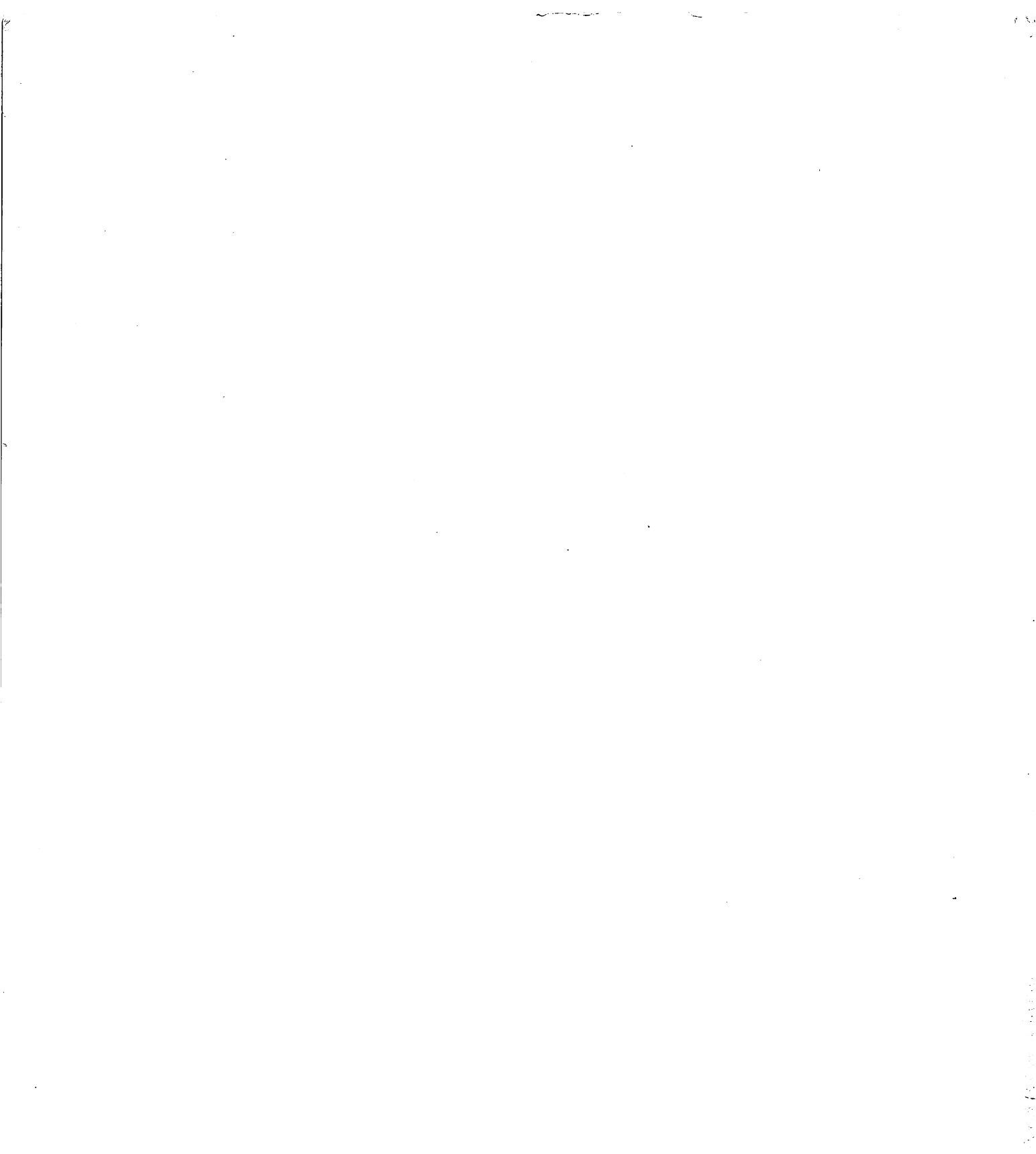




The Advent Craft and Activity Book

Stories, crafts, recipes and poems for the Christmas season



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Stories, crafts, recipes and poems for the Christmas season

Christel Dhom

Floris Books

Translated by Bernadette Duncan

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Preface to the English edition

This book is largely based on German traditions, so the reader will encounter many German recipes and customs. It's traditional in Germany to bake Christmas biscuits throughout Advent, and the sweets and biscuits in this book are fun to make with children. In Germany St Nicholas visits on December 6, bringing a sack of presents. He traditionally leaves sweets and gifts in children's polished boots, or in specially made fabric boots, during the night of December 5 or in person on December 6. The main Christmas celebration in Germany takes place on Christmas Eve, when

families gather together for a festive meal. For many families, it is the *Christkind* (the Christ Child) who, as an angel-like being, prepares the Christmas tree in secret and brings all the presents on Christmas Eve. The period from December 25 to January 5 is called the Twelve Holy Nights, and is a period of rest and reflection, spent with the family. This book goes on to suggest ideas for celebrating New Year's Eve and Day with children, and includes Epiphany or Three Kings' Day on January 6 as the final festival of the Christmas season.

Christmas Memories

A discussion sprang up amongst the teachers in our school staff room about whether Christmas celebrations in the younger classes should, besides performances by the pupils, also include fruit punch, biscuits and Lebkuchen (gingerbread). Several colleagues described their experience of previous years, saying that most children didn't enjoy these festive occasions any more; the food didn't feel special to them, and mostly they just wanted to mess about, which didn't exactly conjure up a Christmas mood.

This discussion evoked some memories for me. Many years ago, when our children were still quite young, we tried to find ways of celebrating the seasons and festivals. Influenced by our families, by our involvement with anthroposophy and also by our professional training, we created traditions in our family, which, in hindsight, we were happy with.

Well, my husband loved eating Christmas biscuits and they tended to be nibbled away as soon as I baked them. I was just able to save some remnants for Christmas. We always really looked forward to the festive season and all that came with it – especially the children's bright eyes. How would they react to the homemade presents we had been working on for weeks? I once overheard a woman saying to a shop assistant shortly before Christmas, 'I will be so glad when this hype is over! And all that sweet stuff, I can't stand it any more!'

I remembered my training as a kindergarten teacher. There we were taught that the days and weeks before a festival are meant for preparations, culminating in the actual festival itself, and care should be taken not to pre-empt this. It suddenly became clear to me that the special Christmas

biscuits were for the holidays and should not be eaten beforehand! During the course of some long conversations, my husband and I decided which things needed changing in the way we celebrated the festivals.

The following year, the first Lebkuchen appeared in the shops at the end of September. I must admit I only just managed to walk past without buying them, since I find their spicy scent so warm and comforting. We moved baking Christmas biscuits to Advent time. The children loved helping and were usually allowed to try some of each kind. The fact that the Christ Child (see Preface, on page 9) picked them up to keep them safe until Christmas did not appear to bother them.

We also created window decorations, Christmas cards, gift tags and small presents for godparents and grandparents. The children were allowed to help the Christ Child with wrapping some presents. Of course their own presents were made in secret. In the evenings we would gather in the living room, light the candles on the Advent wreath, listen to a story and sing Christmas carols. As the children grew older they accompanied the carols with their instruments.

With Christmas drawing nearer, the excitement always grew... Would there be a tree again? Our children knew that some people bought their own tree and others, such as our family, were given one by the Christ Child. While my husband and children, already dressed in their best, walked through the streets looking at decorated windows to guess where the Christ Child might already have visited, I was busy at home: decorating the tree, putting out biscuits, arranging the presents,

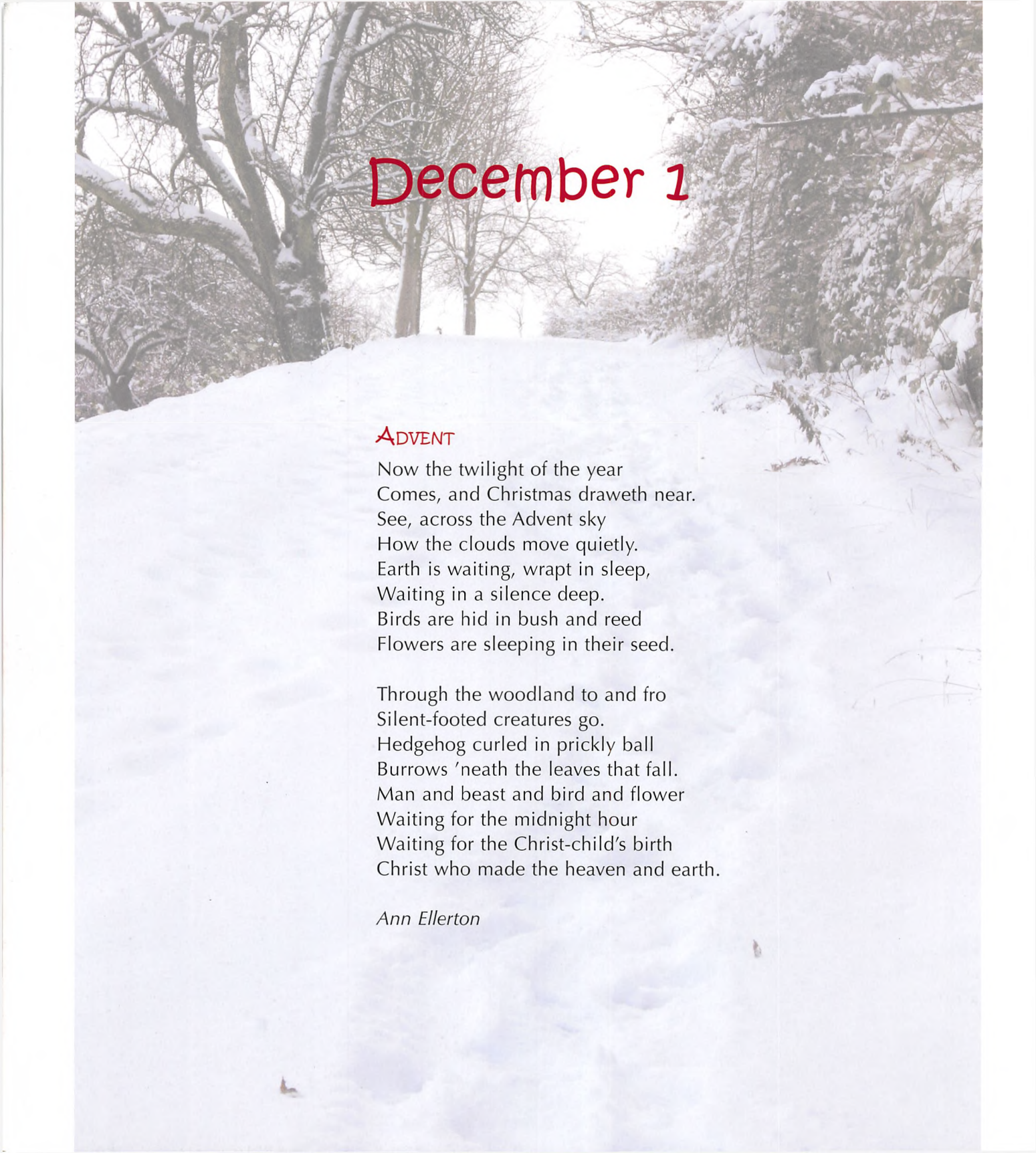
and so on. I had to be well organised since there wasn't much time. After the walk we all attended church together. There we heard about Mary and Joseph, the star and the stable, the shepherds and, of course, the child in the manger. On our way home, my husband or I had to 'dash ahead to the toilet' to prepare the surprise.

By the time the others arrived and had taken off their jackets and shoes, the candles on the tree were lit and our living room was lovely and bright. Everyone was overjoyed that the biscuits were back and that the Christ Child had brought us a tree! The baby Jesus was lying in the manger – an unmistakable sign that there had been a visitor during our absence. For many years these rituals were the most important features of our Christmas. As the children grew into teenagers they got more and more involved with the preparations, such as decorating the tree. Naturally some of our traditions changed, but there were also old beloved habits that we kept.

As adults we all experience times of crisis that require extra strength. While going through these phases, memories of happy, joyful occasions during childhood can help. As parents and educators we are given the opportunity to celebrate festivals and create traditions that our children – and we ourselves – can think back to, allowing the joyful atmosphere to live on beyond the actual festivals.

In the following pages you will find traditional and new recipes, games, stories, crafts and poems. I hope that the host of activities for both children and adults will make the weeks of Advent and Christmas a time of year to fondly remember.





December 1

ADVENT

Now the twilight of the year
Comes, and Christmas draweth near.
See, across the Advent sky
How the clouds move quietly.
Earth is waiting, wrapt in sleep,
Waiting in a silence deep.
Birds are hid in bush and reed
Flowers are sleeping in their seed.

Through the woodland to and fro
Silent-footed creatures go.
Hedgehog curled in prickly ball
Burrows 'neath the leaves that fall.
Man and beast and bird and flower
Waiting for the midnight hour
Waiting for the Christ-child's birth
Christ who made the heaven and earth.

Ann Ellerton

History of the Advent calendar

An Advent calendar covers the days from 1 to 25 December, and is meant to shorten the waiting time leading up to Christmas. A German minister's son named Gerhard Lange invented this popular custom around one hundred years ago. He founded a printing press in Munich and published the first printed Advent calendars at the beginning of the twentieth century. People thought it was a lovely idea and it quickly caught on in southern Germany and then spread to other European countries and the USA.

The first Advent calendars featured a small window for each day, which children opened to reveal a religious picture behind. In recent times small chocolate figures have often been added behind the windows, such as teddy bears, cars, stars or bells.

Over the course of its history, the Advent calendar has undergone a multitude of changes and design variations. One beautiful tradition, for instance, is to add a piece of straw to the manger on the nativity scene every day, representing a good deed, so the baby Jesus has a soft bed to lie on for Christmas.

Everyone loves homemade Advent calendars. They can be designed to suit your own tastes, adding a sweet or a small gift for each day: a rubber, pencil sharpener, hair band, gem, gnome, and so on. Another good idea is to write craft instructions, recipes, songs, poems or suggestions for outings on to pieces of paper and hide these in the Advent calendar. They can become an integral part of the weeks before Christmas, providing lots of ideas for fun activities.





Advent calendar with hessian bags

MATERIALS

100 x 120 cm (39 x 47 in) hessian
Approximately 12 m (39 ft) red ribbon or
decorative cord
Sewing kit
Stars or other wooden decorations

Cut 24 pieces of material sized 13 x 34 cm (5 x 13 in) from the hessian. Fold them in half and close the side seams with saddle-stitch, leaving 1.5 cm (½ in) at the edges. Secure the thread well at the beginning and end. You can sew by hand or use a sewing machine. It's not necessary to hem the edges since the small bags are not going to be handled very much.

Once all 24 bags are sewn up, turn inside out and fill them. The bags have enough space to hold small presents for all family members, so there's no need to sew a separate calendar for each person.

The filled bags are tied shut with a bow of red ribbon. You may wish to decorate every second bag with a star or a small wooden figure. There are many ways to decorate these simple bags – use your imagination.

Finally, tie all of the bags to a long length of red ribbon. The finished Advent calendar can be suspended horizontally on a wall, or it can be attached to the top of a door frame to hang vertically.

Chocolate almond macaroons

INGREDIENTS

3 egg whites
150 g (5¼ oz) brown sugar
125 g (4⅓ oz) dark chocolate, grated
250 g (9¾ oz) ground almonds

Whisk the egg whites until quite stiff and add the sugar, a little at a time. Lightly fold in the finely ground chocolate and almonds. Spoon walnut-sized pieces of mixture on to a baking tray lined with baking parchment. Bake in a pre-heated oven at 150°C (300°F) for 25 minutes.

Advent angels game

Advent Angels is a popular activity for Advent time. It's similar to the tradition of Secret Santa, but it can last for the whole Advent period and doesn't have to involve buying presents. It is suited to a large family, a group of colleagues or a whole school class. Everyone writes their name on a piece of paper, folds it in half and puts it into a basket. Then the participants all draw a name from the basket; they have to give gifts to and show special attention to this person during Advent.

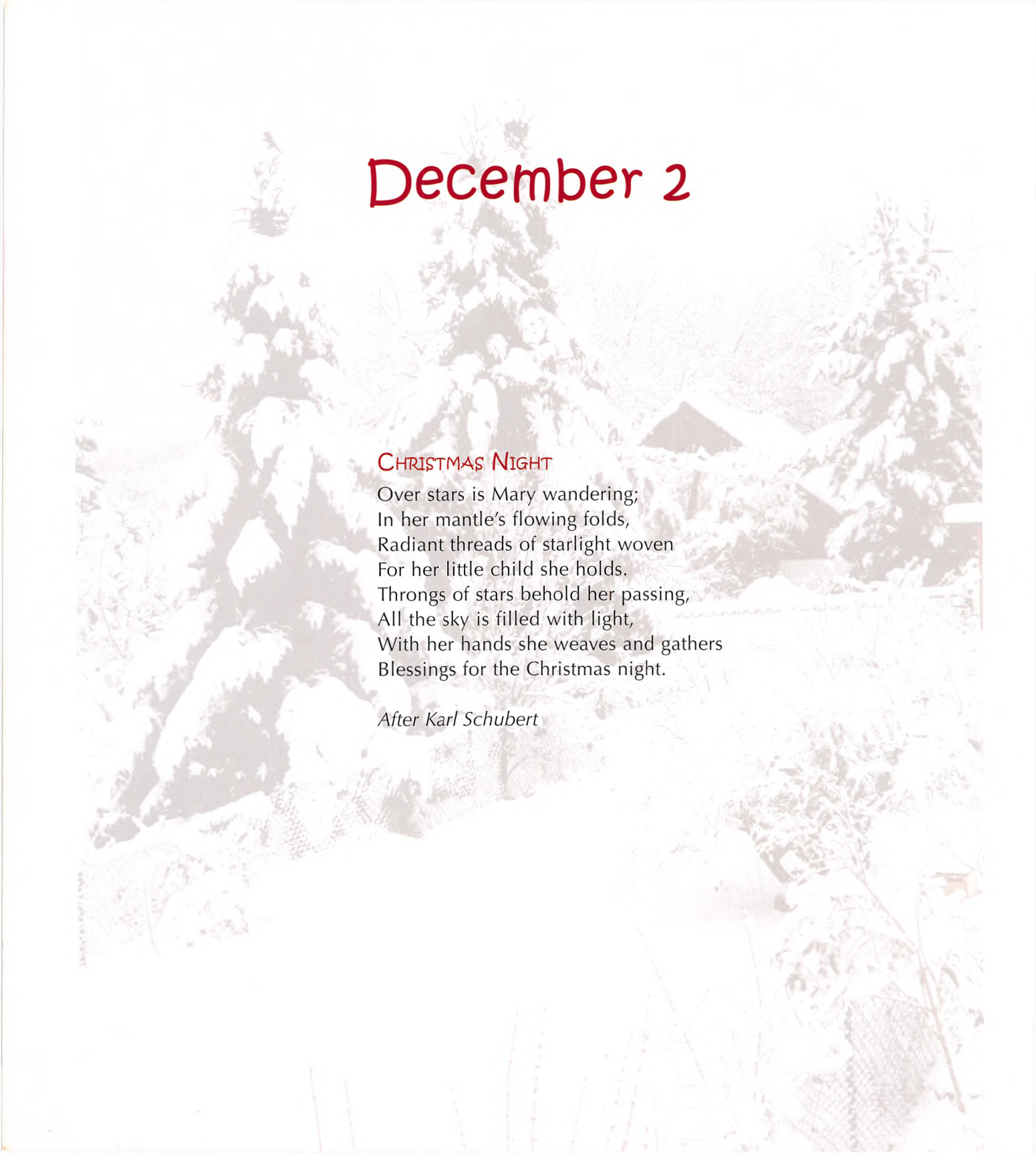
Before getting started it's important to agree on how you want the giving to take place. The group might decide, for example, that once or twice a week some sweets or small presents will appear, or perhaps cards with a verse. Or it can be a lovely surprise to find that somebody is secretly doing you a favour. Peter, for instance, may decide to empty the dishwasher for Sophie, but without Sophie noticing. Advent Angels work



anonymously and should not be discovered. This makes the game more fun and exciting to play.

You can leave it at that with the Advent Angels remaining unknown, so you will never find out who delighted you with gifts. Or perhaps during a Christmas party the Advent Angels can be revealed and receive a present from the person they have been kind to. This can produce some lovely surprises.

The idea behind Advent Angels is not necessarily to choose a friend or family member who you are kind to anyway, but to put special thought into making someone happy – perhaps someone you don't know very well.



December 2

CHRISTMAS NIGHT

Over stars is Mary wandering;
In her mantle's flowing folds,
Radiant threads of starlight woven
For her little child she holds.
Throngs of stars behold her passing,
All the sky is filled with light,
With her hands she weaves and gathers
Blessings for the Christmas night.

After Karl Schubert

History of the Advent wreath

Around 150 years ago the protestant minister Johann Hinrich Wichern founded the Rauhe Haus (rough house) near Hamburg as a new home for street children and youths that nobody was looking after. Mr Wichern wanted to create a homely atmosphere for these young people who mostly only knew poverty. So he took a large wooden hoop with a diameter of about 2 m (6 ½ ft), placed 24 candles on it and suspended it from the ceiling like a chandelier. Every evening he and his rough and tumble crowd of youngsters would gather there to sing carols and listen to stories. Each day they would light a new candle until, on Christmas Eve, the whole round of 24 candles was burning and the room was brightly lit. So everyone was able to experience how even during the darkest time of year light and warmth could enter the house.

Over time the wooden hoop would be decorated with fir twigs as a sign of new hope. Instead of the original 24 candles, they began using only four thick red candles representing the four Sundays before Christmas.

Following on from this the custom of binding an Advent wreath from fir twigs became popular in Protestant families in Northern Germany and today it can be found all over the world.





Making an Advent or door wreath

MATERIALS

Straw wreath base
Florist's wire (green)
Four candles
Fresh boughs of fir or box, some ivy
Decorations (optional): ribbon bows, orange slices, walnuts, small apples, tree cones, dried lemons, figures such as reindeer or angels, stars made from bark etc.
Secateurs and pliers
Hot glue gun

Using secateurs, cut the greenery into lengths of 8–10 cm (3–4 in) and sort the cuttings into groups of the same kind of plant. Tie a small bunch of greenery on to the straw wreath using wire. Make sure the fir tips all point clockwise. Tie even bunches of cuttings all around the wreath, with slightly less greenery needed on the inside. Progressively cover the straw wreath, taking extra care to merge the greenery at the beginning and end. If this joining section doesn't look tidy, you can cover it with a pretty ribbon and bow.

The decorations added may vary, depending on whether it will be used as an Advent wreath or as a door wreath.

If you do not wish to make a wreath with greenery, you can also glue dried materials to the straw base: first of all, bits of bark are glued to the straw wreath. Then the gaps are filled with moss. Now you can add candles, cones, stars, apples etc. Such a wreath may be used for a number of years.





German Advent trifle

INGREDIENTS FOR THE SPONGE

2 eggs
2 tbsp hot water
100 g (3½ oz) brown sugar
½ tsp vanilla essence
100 g (3½ oz) spelt flour
1 tbsp cocoa powder
1 tsp baking powder
200 ml (¾–1 cup) black coffee
1 shot glass kirsch or Amaretto
1 cup preserved cherries

Beat the eggs, water, sugar and vanilla until fluffy. Mix the flour, baking powder and cocoa powder together, sift and fold into the mixture.

Bake in a round, greased tin at 175°C (350°F) for about 20 minutes.

Cut the baked and cooled sponge cake into cubes and put into a bowl.

Mix the black coffee with the kirsch or Amaretto and pour evenly over the sponge cubes. Now put the stoned and drained cherries on to the sponge cubes.

INGREDIENTS FOR THE TOPPING

250 g (9 oz) mascarpone
250 g (9 oz) whipping cream
2 tbsp brown sugar
250 g (9 oz) quark or cream cheese
1–2 tbsp cocoa powder

Beat the mascarpone, whipping cream, quark or cream cheese and sugar until fluffy and creamy. Spread the topping over the cherries. Sift the cocoa powder all over the top.

Garnish with whipped cream, chocolate leaves or cherries. Refrigerate before serving.

VARIATIONS

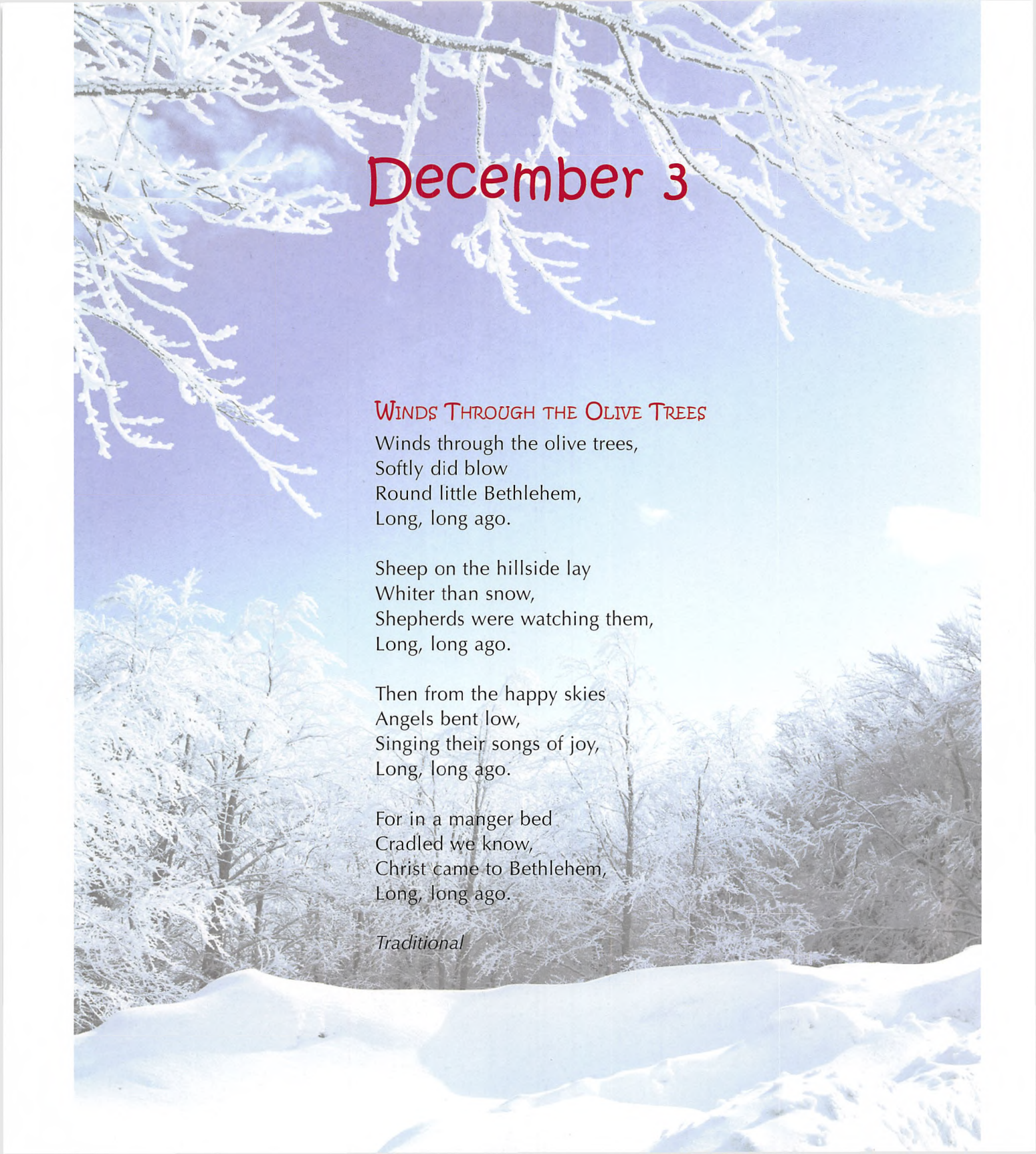
Instead of the dark sponge cake you can also use Lebkuchen or gingerbread.

Lighter, plain sponge cakes also go well with different types of fruit, such as raspberries, pineapple and tangerines.

The alcohol may be omitted altogether.

If you are making a cake and it doesn't come out well, or it falls apart, you can easily make it into a trifle!





December 3

WINDS THROUGH THE OLIVE TREES

Winds through the olive trees,
Softly did blow
Round little Bethlehem,
Long, long ago.

Sheep on the hillside lay
Whiter than snow,
Shepherds were watching them,
Long, long ago.

Then from the happy skies
Angels bent low,
Singing their songs of joy,
Long, long ago.

For in a manger bed
Cradled we know,
Christ came to Bethlehem,
Long, long ago.

Traditional



Making a nativity scene

We always collect stones, branches, cones, moss and bits of bark for our nativity scene on our walks during the days preceding Advent. Together with the children we create a landscape from these materials on a small table in the living room, first only using stones and then plants. As a background we use a blue cloth for the starry heavens. Each day in Advent another star appears, so by Christmas Eve there will be 24 stars.

On the left we build a stable from bits of bark or a suitable piece of branch. The stable is laid out with straw. A path of small stones winds itself through the mossy landscape leading to the stable.

Then gradually during Advent the sheep appear. Ox and donkey take up their place in the manger. Only when the angel arrives at the stable will Mary and Joseph start their journey to Bethlehem. Every day they move a little closer to the stable while the shepherds watch over their sheep. On December 24 Mary and Joseph arrive in the stable and the baby Jesus is lying in the manger.

Once a tradition like this has been started, it can be repeated every year to become an important and integral part of the weeks before Christmas.

Nativity figures: magic wool sheep, ox and donkey

MATERIALS

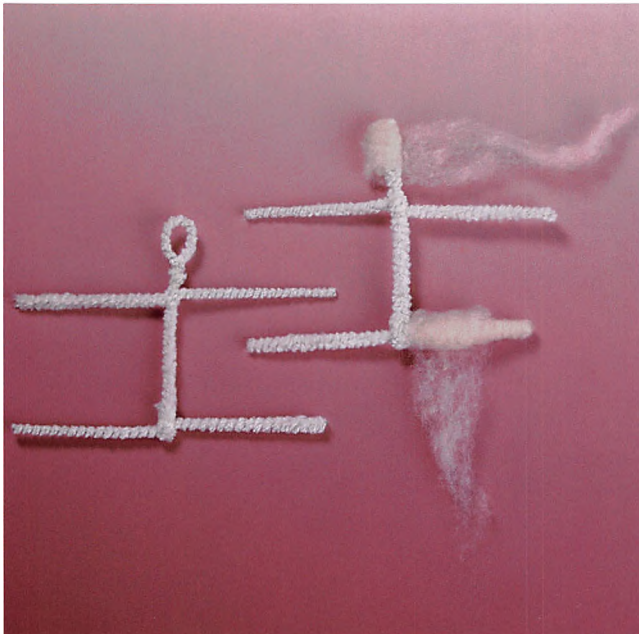
White unspun sheep's wool
3 pipe-cleaners per sheep
Sewing kit

Shorten the pipe-cleaners by about a third and bend them to form the basic structure of a sheep (see illustrations): one pipe-cleaner for the head and body and one pipe-cleaner for each pair of legs.

Start by winding a very thin strand of white wool around the mouth, then move on to the head itself. Next wind a thin layer of wool around the end of each leg, bend over approximately 1 cm (½ in) so the wool will not slip off, then wind more wool on top of the foot before covering the whole leg. Make sure that the leg is thinner at the foot end and that the back legs are thicker than the front legs. Starting from the head, wind some wool around the neck and then continue winding wool around the whole body of the sheep.

To make ears and a tail, thread a very thin strand of wool on to a darning needle and pull it through the sheep in the appropriate places. Shape the ends with scissors and twist them between moistened fingertips.

Finally, bend the little sheep into a natural posture.



Ox

MATERIALS

Brown unspun sheep's wool
Pipe-cleaners
Sewing kit

Make the ox according to the instructions for the sheep, but use unshortened pipe-cleaners and brown wool. The ears are a little larger and the ox also has two horns. To make these, pull a light-coloured strand of wool through the head and twist the ends between moistened fingertips.



Donkey

MATERIALS

Grey unspun sheep's wool
Pipe-cleaners
Sewing kit

The donkey, too, is made according to the instructions for the sheep. Use grey wool and unshortened pipe-cleaners. The donkey has long, pointed ears and a short mane along its head and neck.



Traditional Christmas Stollen



INGREDIENTS (FOR 2 STOLLEN)

300 g (10½ oz) sultanas
100 g (3½ oz) candied lemon peel
100 g (3½ oz) candied orange peel
200 g (7 oz) almonds
4 tbsp rum or lemon juice
750 g (1½ lb) spelt flour
80 g (3 oz) fresh yeast
1 tsp vanilla essence
1 pinch salt
¼ litre (1 cup) milk
300 g (10½ oz) butter or margarine
100 g (3 ½ oz) sugar
Icing sugar (powdered sugar) for dusting

Chop the candied lemon and orange peel and the almonds very finely, pour the rum over them and let everything soak for half an hour.

Sift the flour into a bowl and make a well in the centre. Put the salt, sugar and vanilla essence around the edge. Chop the butter/margarine into cubes and scatter on top of the flour. Dissolve the yeast in the lukewarm milk, add this to the flour mixture and knead everything into a firm dough.

Leave to rise in a warm place for about 30 minutes.

Then add the chopped fruit and almonds, knead again and leave to rise for another 30 minutes.

Now divide the dough into two halves and, with a rolling pin, roll each into a rectangle. Fold the two longer sides into the middle, so they overlap, which creates the typical Stollen shape.

Place on a baking tray lined with baking parchment and leave to rise for a further 30 minutes.

Repeat the process with the second half, or divide it into 5–6 equal pieces and shape round balls. After rising and baking they will look like mini Stollen and, wrapped in cellophane, make lovely presents.

Bake the large Stollen at 190°C (375°F) for about an hour. With the mini Stollen the baking time decreases according to size.

Cool on a wire rack, wrap in tinfoil and keep in a cool place. Stollen keeps for many weeks but it also tastes great when eaten fresh. Dust with icing sugar before serving.



Origins of the Christmas Stollen

The traditional Christmas Stollen dates back to the thirteenth century, and stems from the continental tradition of baking specific shapes for special occasions. The folded dough was intended to symbolise the manger or the baby Jesus wrapped in white swaddling cloths. Even today, Stollen is only baked during the Christmas season.

Stollen was first mentioned in writing in an old document in 1329, wherein the bakers in the German town of Naumburg in Saxony declared their willingness to deliver a Stollen made from wheat to their bishop. This became the basis of the bakers' tax duty towards their rulers. The inhabitants of the castle continued to be supplied with Christmas Stollen by the bakers' guild until 1913.

It is the Christmas Stollen from Dresden that has become world famous. There are hundreds of different recipes that are all quite rich. For a long time, eating Stollen used to be reserved for kings and dukes, for the rich clergy and aristocracy. Many of the spices and Mediterranean ingredients had to be transported a long way and were therefore very expensive. For the common folk they were unknown or unaffordable.

Originating in Saxony, which was thought to be an affluent region, the tradition of baking Stollen spread into many parts of the world. Nowadays the special ingredients for Stollen are available everywhere and are affordable, so everyone can enjoy this delicacy at Christmas. A homemade Christmas Stollen is still highly valued.

December 4

ADVENT

The gift of light
I thankfully hold
And pass to my neighbour
Its shining gold
That everyone may
Feel its glow,
Receiving and giving
May love and grow.

When all our brothers
Have lit their light
No more shall continue
The darkness of night:
But joyful all men
The message shall hear:
'The Christ draws near!'

Anonymous

Pentagon star lantern

MATERIALS

Paper painted with bright watercolours
Cardboard for making a template
Pencil, ruler, scissors, kitchen knife
Cooking oil, scented oil, brush
Glue

Using the pattern illustrated here, and enlarging it to the required size, make a cardboard pentagon template. The sides of the pentagon may be between 5 and 9 cm (2 and 3½ in).

Place the template on to the paper, trace the shape with a sharp pencil and cut out ten pentagons. Now mark the middle point of the sides and use the ruler to connect two neighbouring points. With the kitchen knife carefully score the paper where the folds will be (see the dotted lines on the diagram). Fold the corners you've now created to make another smaller pentagon. Take care, as this is a fiddly job.

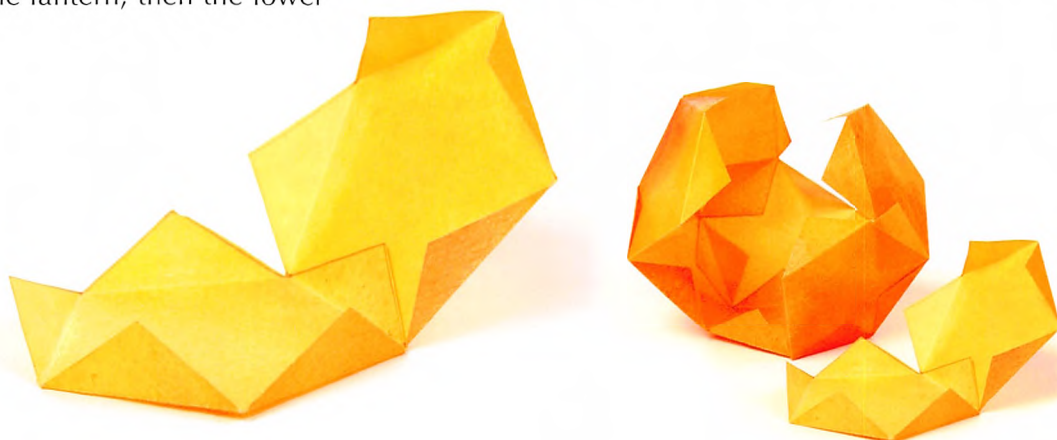
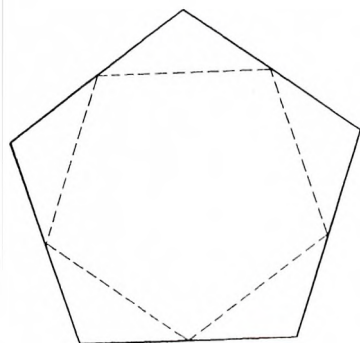
To glue the stars together, the triangular corners of the neighbouring pentagons have to overlap. Start by gluing together the pentagons that will form the upper half of the lantern, then the lower



half, and finally glue the two halves together. Glue the corners of the upper and lower edges to the inside of the lantern so they do not show.

After the glue has dried completely, brush the paper lantern shade sparingly with oil (mix cooking oil with a couple of drops of scented oil) and rub it in with an old rag. This will turn the paper transparent.

Place a tea light in a glass holder inside your lantern. Because of the danger of starting a fire, never leave the little lantern unattended while lit!





Orange jelly

INGREDIENTS

1 litre (1 quart) freshly squeezed orange juice
 1 lemon, juice and zest
 500 g (1 lb) light brown sugar
 8 sheets leaf gelatine

Place the gelatine sheets into a bowl and cover with cold water.

Put the orange juice and sugar in a pan, stir, bring to the boil and cook for 1–2 minutes. Add the juice and zest of an unwaxed lemon.

Remove the gelatine from the cold water, squeezing out any excess water, then add to the pan and whisk until dissolved.

Pour the hot fluid into clean glass jars that have been sterilised using boiling water. Put the lids on tightly and leave to cool upside down. Keep the jars of jelly refrigerated once opened.

Legend of St Barbara

My grandmother lived in a small cottage in the country and her house was surrounded by a beautiful garden. In summer, red geraniums flowered at her windows, the cat slept on a bench in the sun and the garden was full of flowers in many beautiful shades of colour. Grandmother loved her garden and sometimes she would say proudly that it presented her with flowers the whole year round – just like a good friend. Well, we were not quite sure whether to believe this.

Once when I was visiting – it was the beginning of December – she went into the garden to cut some twigs from her cherry tree. She placed them into lukewarm water overnight and the next morning she put them into a vase so they would flower by Christmas Day. Then she sat down with me and told me the following story:

A long time ago there was a rich merchant who lived in Greece. He came from a royal family and his name was Dioskuros. Dioskuros had a lovely daughter called Barbara. The whole family did not believe in God or Jesus – they followed their pagan religion.

Now the time came that Dioskuros was planning to set off on a long journey. He had to buy new goods and was expecting to be away for a long time. But he was very worried about his beloved daughter. What could he do to protect her during his absence so she would come to no harm? One night he had the idea to hide Barbara away in a locked tower, together with her maid.

And that is what happened. Barbara spent many weeks cut off from the rest of the world in a tower. During this time her maid told her about the Christian God and Jesus Christ, his son.

She told Barbara about the birth in the stable, about the three kings, the flight to Egypt, the disciples following Jesus and about the miracles he performed. Then she also told her about the last supper and the resurrection.

When Dioskuros returned, he soon noticed that his daughter seemed quite changed. She was not the girl any more who he had left behind before his travels. Barbara was very impressed by what her maid had told her during their stay in the tower, and since then she had started to believe in Jesus and his Father in heaven. Dioskuros grew more and more angry with her and tried everything to persuade her to change her mind – he even threatened her with death.

Barbara, however, showed courage and strength and replied to her father, 'The curse of your gods I do not fear, for I am blessed by Christ.'

Hate began more and more to take the place of love in Dioskuros' heart. It's hard to believe, but he ordered Barbara to be locked up in prison.

For a long time after, people said that on her way to prison Barbara passed a cherry tree. She broke off a twig that had rubbed against her and placed it in a jug of fresh water in her prison cell. It is said that on the day her death sentence was pronounced, the twig burst into blossom.

This legend about St Barbara that my grandmother told me has become known in many parts of the world. For this reason it now a widespread custom on December 4, the feast day of St Barbara, to cut cherry twigs and put them into a vase. These twigs are meant to give strength and courage, and they remind people of light in the darkness of winter. My grandmother would change the water in the vase every three days. With the warmth in the room the buds started to swell and eventually

burst open to show their blossoms at Christmas. So grandmother was right after all when she said that her garden presented her with flowers the whole year round.



December 5



ST NICHOLAS SONG

St Nicholas, St Nicholas,
O come to us tonight,
We're gathered here to wait for you
This gladsome, merry night.
No rods for us are in your sack,
So keep them out of sight,
For ev'ry day thro' all the year
We've tried, as children should,
To speak the truth and do the right,
Be gentle, kind, and good.

St Nicholas, St Nicholas,
We wait for you tonight,
In readiness the sheet we've spread

So smooth upon the floor,
To catch the shower of fruits and sweets
When you're within our door.
O hasten, hasten, dear old friend,
And open wide your pack,
For ev'ry year when we've been good
We're glad to see you back.

St Nicholas, St Nicholas,
We wait for you tonight,
St Nicholas, St Nicholas,
We welcome you tonight.

Eleanor Amerman Sutphen

Elisen Lebkuchen (gingerbread for Elise)

INGREDIENTS

200 g (7 oz) sugar
5 eggs
50 g (1¾ oz) candied lemon peel
50 g (1¾ oz) candied orange peel
300 g (10½ oz) ground almonds
150 g (5¼ oz) plain white flour
2 tsp mixed spices, such as: 1 tsp cinnamon,
one pinch each of mace, cloves, cardamom
and ginger
40 thin wafers, approximately 7 cm (2¾ in)
diameter

Whisk the sugar and eggs together until fluffy. Slowly add the finely chopped lemon and orange peel, ground almonds, flour and spice.

Arrange the wafers on two baking trays, 20 on each. (If you can't find suitable wafers, you can make these without them, using baking parchment to prevent the Lebkuchen from sticking to the trays.)

Dip a tablespoon into cold water and portion the dough on to the wafers, smoothing the Lebkuchen towards the edges. Leave to dry for 6–8 hours and bake in a preheated oven at 180°C (350°F) for 20 minutes.

Before drying, you can decorate the Lebkuchen with peeled almond halves. To do this, scald the almonds with boiling water, let them stand for five minutes, then peel. Alternatively you can coat the Lebkuchen with sugar or chocolate icing after baking.





SUGAR ICING (FROSTING)

Bring to the boil 1 tbsp lemon juice, 1 tbsp water and 50 g (1¾ oz) sugar, and coat the Lebkuchen.

CHOCOLATE ICING

Melt 12 g (½ oz) butter and 100 g (3½ oz) dark chocolate on a very low heat while stirring, and coat the Lebkuchen.

Origins of Elisen Lebkuchen

Originally Lebkuchen were known as food for sick people, much like medicine. Nuts, almonds and honey are very nutritious and the spices contained in them support the metabolism. The ingredients were costly and not readily available, which is why for a long time people couldn't afford Lebkuchen as a treat.

In Nuremberg, Lebkuchen bakers have been known since 1395. There were good trade connections between Nuremberg and Venice, where the precious spices could be obtained. The large area of state-owned forest to the north and the east of Nuremberg, also known as the 'bee gardens', provided the vast amounts of honey needed by the Lebkuchen bakers.

In 1643 the Lebkuchen guild was founded. In the beginning the guild had less than a dozen members. Today more than 4000 people work in the Lebkuchen-producing industry.

The oldest known Lebkuchen recipe is kept in a museum in Nuremberg and includes sugar, honey, cinnamon, mace, nuts, pepper and flour.

The Elisen Lebkuchen is no doubt the most delicate and famous kind. It has been baked since 1808 and the story goes that it was created in memory of the beautiful daughter of a Lebkuchen baker, Elise. The distinct characteristic of an Elisen Lebkuchen is that it's baked with very little flour and on wafers.

Riddles

Can you guess what's being described in these riddles? You'll find the answers on page 142.

Despite snow so bright
There are flowers white,
Blossoming in this dark time...
Who knows the meaning of my rhyme?

Tell me, what has this:
Five caves and only one entrance...



December 6

ST NICHOLAS VERSE

Upon his snow white steed
With wind and lightning speed
St Nicholas leaves the sky
And comes a riding by.

The little hare hops nigh
And lifts his nose up high.
The stag, with pointing horn,
Jumps over bush and thorn.

And all the creatures dear
Are drawing quickly near.
Before St Nicholas bow
Their little heads so low.

But we will learn a tune
Of sun and star and moon,
And sing our happy lay,
Sing on St Nicholas day.

Traditional German

Making a St Nicholas Boot

We can sew a boot for St Nicholas Day, or a stocking for Christmas, from red felt.

MATERIALS

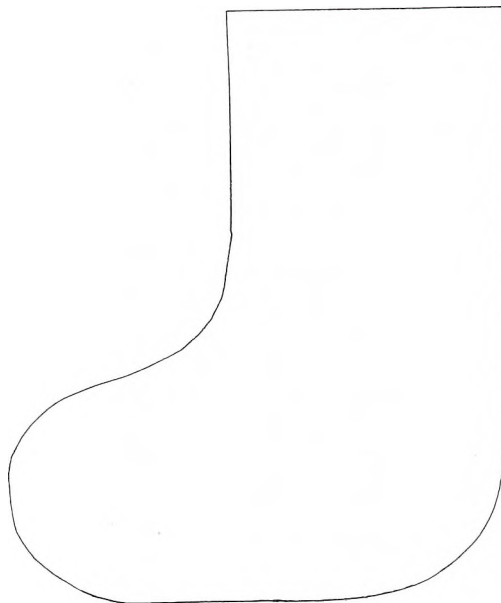
2 pieces of red felt, 20 x 30 cm (8 x 12 in)
Golden embroidery thread or gift cord
Sewing kit

Copy the shape of the St Nicholas boot, enlarging it to the desired size, on to both felt pieces and cut them out.

Embroider stars on to one of the boot halves using golden thread. You can make a suitable thread by separating one thin golden strand from a length of gift cord.

Next, cut two 10 x 1.5 cm (4 x 1/2 in) strips of red felt to make a loop for hanging up the boot. Sew them together using a saddle-stitch.

Lay both boot halves on top of each other, so the embroidered side is on top, insert the loop between the halves and sew up the boot with saddle-stitch. It is quickest to do this on a sewing machine, but you can sew it by hand as well.





Nibble nuts

INGREDIENTS

125 g (4½ oz) margarine
50 g (1¾ oz) sugar
1 tsp vanilla essence
125 g (4½ oz) plain white flour
30 g (1 oz) ground hazelnuts
½ tsp cinnamon
4 tbsp cocoa powder
For the filling: approximately 45 roasted hazelnuts

Cream together the sugar and margarine until fluffy. Slowly stir in the sifted flour, the ground hazelnuts, vanilla essence, cinnamon and cocoa powder, and knead lightly. Wrap and chill in the refrigerator for half an hour.

In the meantime, place the whole hazelnuts on to a baking tray and roast in the oven at 150°C (300°F) for 10 minutes.

Form the dough into a roll with a diameter of 3 cm (1¼ in) and cut off slices approximately 1 cm (½ in) thick. Place a cooled roasted hazelnut on top of each slice and wrap the dough around it. While doing so, try and keep a nut shape.

Line a baking tray with baking parchment and bake in a preheated oven at 160°C (320°F) for 20 minutes. After baking, cool the nibble nuts on a wire rack.

Legend of St Nicholas

It was nearly suppertime and we were supposed to tidy up our toys. But we really couldn't be bothered and we started to throw everything on the floor instead and just fooled around. We were probably making a lot of noise, which no doubt could be heard in the kitchen. So it didn't take long before Mum appeared in the door of our room, not hiding her disappointment.

'You still haven't started to tidy up? That's a shame because I would have liked to polish your boots with you,' she said.

'Polish our boots? What for?' Jonathan wanted to know.

'Well, tomorrow is St Nicholas Day, so it would probably be a good idea if the boots were polished.'

'Oh no, I completely forgot St Nicholas Day. Come on, Anna, hurry!'

It was amazing how quickly we managed to put the toys away, and I must admit it was almost fun. After supper we got out the polish and brushes and made our boots shine.



Before going to bed I asked, 'Please, Mum, can you tell us the real story of St Nicholas?'

'All right, go to the bathroom and get ready and then I'll tell you the story.' We were washed and changed in no time, cleaned our teeth in record speed and finally sat in the living room eagerly listening to our mother...

A long time ago Nicholas lived in Myra, a town in Asia Minor, which is today called Turkey. He was the bishop of the town and could easily be recognised by his blue bishop's cloak, his mitre – that's a bishop's hat – and his crook. Everybody in Myra loved Nicholas for he was warm-hearted and always ready to help people in need.

One year it didn't rain for many months. It was so hot and dry that the grain didn't grow but

withered away. The harvest failed completely. Soon the last supplies were used up and there was nothing left for the people to eat. The country was going hungry and no one knew what to do.

One day a large ship coming from Egypt anchored in Myra harbour. It was on its way to Rome and fully loaded with wheat for the Roman Emperor. Nicholas had an idea. He went down to the harbour and asked the sailors if he could have a few bushels of wheat (a bushel is an old way of measuring; it's about 30 litres or quarts).

'But, my Lord, that is completely out of question,' they said. 'Everything was strictly weighed and recorded in Egypt, and if we arrive in Rome with less wheat than we set off with, the Emperor will punish us.'



'I promise you that with God's help you will unload as much as you loaded on to your vessel. There will be no trouble with the Emperor's soldiers. Think of all the starving people here.'

After much persuasion, the sailors agreed to give some bushels of wheat to Nicholas for the suffering people of his country. Nicholas shared out the grain amongst the needy and there was enough for everyone, until the next harvest.

But the sailors were very worried about what lay ahead. What would become of them when the Romans noticed some grain was missing? While unloading in Rome everything was weighed and checked. In the end the overseer walked up to the sailors and commended them for their care in transporting the wheat. Not one bushel was missing.

The sailors remembered Nicholas, who had obviously worked a miracle, and they prayed and thanked him...

After a short pause, Mum added, 'By the way, St Nicholas was very fond of children. He liked to visit them at night and leave presents without being seen.'

Jonathan and I started to feel sleepy. Hoping that St Nicholas would remember us as well, we went to bed.

In Germany, St Nicholas traditionally leaves sweets and gifts in children's polished boots, or in a specially made fabric boot (like the one on page 37) during the night of December 5, or he visits in person on December 6 carrying gifts in a big sack.

Lebkuchen game

Usually St Nicholas brings lots of Lebkuchen (gingerbread). On a rainy afternoon, eating Lebkuchen can be turned into a game.

YOU WILL NEED

Lebkuchen or gingerbread

Knife and fork

A dice

Gloves, scarf and hat

The players sit around a table. One after the other they throw the dice. Whoever rolls a six puts on the hat and gloves, wraps the scarf around his neck and attempts to eat a bit of Lebkuchen using the knife and fork. You have to hurry as the others continue to roll the dice until the next person throws a six, and takes their turn getting dressed up and eating...

This game can be a lot of fun, even played with a group of adults in the evening.

Riddle

Can you guess what's being described in this riddle? You'll find the answer on page 142.

It's baking day for everyone, so come along!
Bring sweet honey, almonds and a song
To shape this heavenly food, such delight...
St Nicholas will surely leave some tonight.



December 7

WHEN ICICLES HANG BY THE WALL

When icicles hang by the wall
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail
And Tom bears logs into the hall
And milk comes frozen home in pail,
When blood is nipp'd and ways be foul,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
Tu-whit;
Tu-who, a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.
When all aloud the wind doth blow
And coughing drowns the parson's saw
And birds sit brooding in the snow
And Marian's nose looks red and raw,
When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
Tu-whit;
Tu-who, a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

William Shakespeare, from Love's Labours Lost, Act V, scene II

Star Cake

INGREDIENTS FOR THE DOUGH

3 eggs
150 g (5¼ oz) sugar
150 g (5¼ oz) margarine
1 tsp vanilla essence
100 ml (½ cup) red currant, cherry or grape juice
100 g (3½ oz) grated dark chocolate
1 pinch salt
200 g (7 oz) plain white flour
1 ½ level tsp baking powder
1 tsp cocoa powder
1 tsp cinnamon

Beat the eggs, sugar and margarine until fluffy. Stir in the vanilla essence, juice, grated chocolate and a pinch of salt. Sift together the flour, baking powder, cocoa powder and cinnamon and fold in.

Turn into in a greased star-shaped cake tin and bake in a preheated oven at 180°C (350°F) for 45 minutes.



TIP

If you double the ingredients the dough will be enough to make a ring-shaped cake, which will take one hour to bake.

INGREDIENTS FOR THE ICING (FROSTING)

100 g (3½ oz) chocolate
15 g (½ oz) butter
1 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp Lebkuchen spice mixture (see page 33)

Heat up the butter on a very low heat. Add the chocolate and spices and stir until everything is melted together. Glaze the cooled cake with a pastry brush.



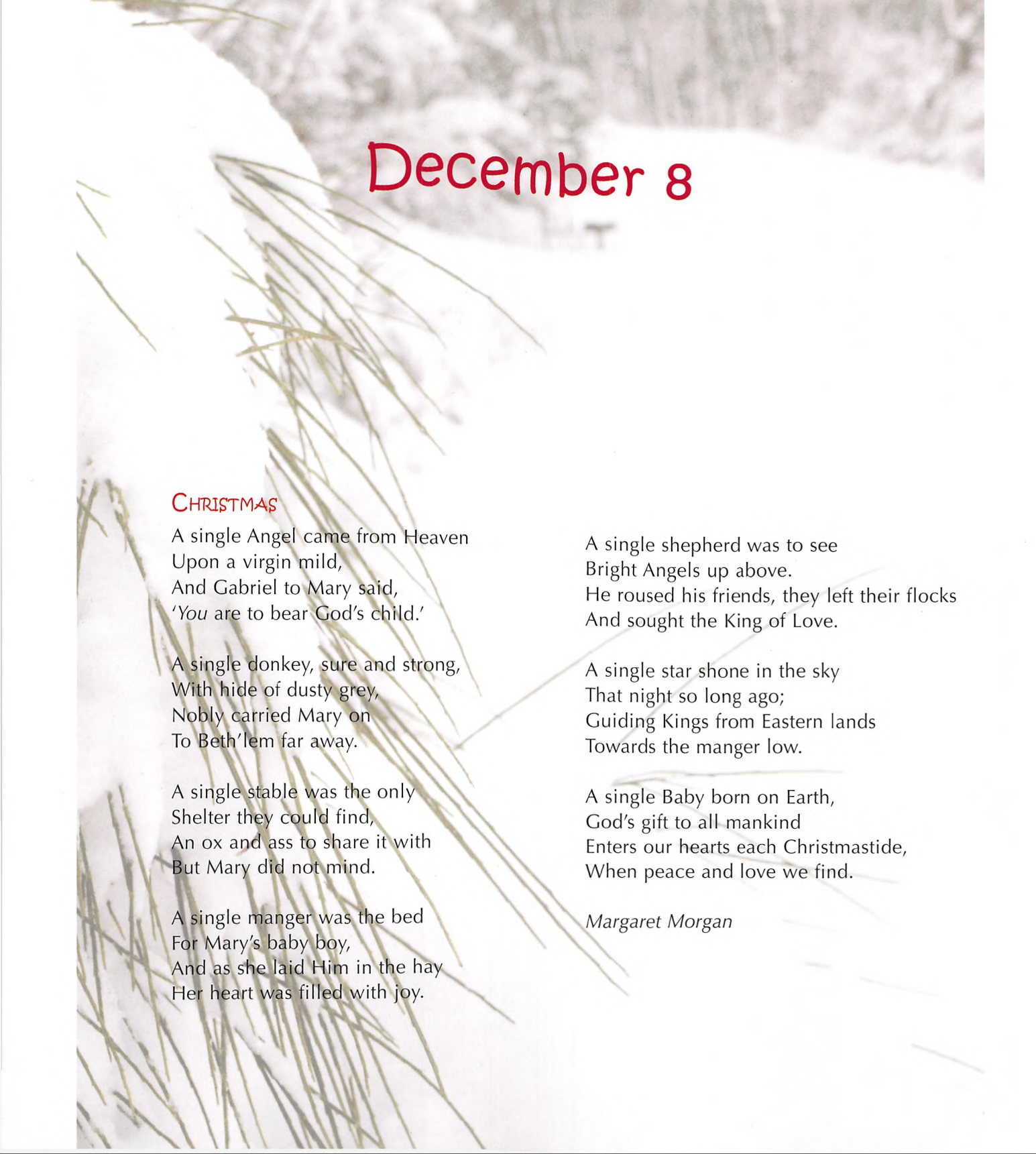
Mistletoe traditions

The mistletoe plant is a semi-parasitic plant, which grows in the crowns of many different kinds of deciduous and coniferous trees. It is an evergreen with leathery leaves and white berries, which get spread by the birds. Various species of mistletoe can be found all over the world. The mistletoe's unusual appearance and habitat are probably the reasons why it came to be known as a 'magical' plant.

The mythology of mistletoe goes back a long time in history. It's thought that the burning thorn bush mentioned in the Old Testament, out of which God spoke to Moses, belonged to the mistletoe family. People from many different cultures venerate the mistletoe because of its magical properties. Mistletoe is meant to alleviate poisoning, to break open locks and to protect against fire and sickness. The old Germanic tribes used to decorate their doors with mistletoe believing it would keep away bad spirits. In past times, many people attributed good luck, health, fertility and a plentiful harvest to the power of the mistletoe. It was seen as a symbol of life and survival. It was even praised as a cure for epilepsy and vertigo. The priest and healer Sebastian Kneipp was convinced about the mistletoe's healing properties too, and he administered it to cure epilepsy. Nowadays mistletoe preparations are used to treat cancer and to lower blood pressure.

In Scandinavia and Great Britain there has been a long tradition of decorating the home with mistletoe. The most popular custom connected with this plant is probably the kiss under the mistletoe. On the European continent, mistletoe has become part of the Advent and Christmas season, and many people buy twigs from the numerous Christmas markets held in most towns.





December 8

CHRISTMAS

A single Angel came from Heaven
Upon a virgin mild,
And Gabriel to Mary said,
'You are to bear God's child.'

A single donkey, sure and strong,
With hide of dusty grey,
Nobly carried Mary on
To Beth'lem far away.

A single stable was the only
Shelter they could find,
An ox and ass to share it with
But Mary did not mind.

A single manger was the bed
For Mary's baby boy,
And as she laid Him in the hay
Her heart was filled with joy.

A single shepherd was to see
Bright Angels up above.
He roused his friends, they left their flocks
And sought the King of Love.

A single star shone in the sky
That night so long ago;
Guiding Kings from Eastern lands
Towards the manger low.

A single Baby born on Earth,
God's gift to all mankind
Enters our hearts each Christmastide,
When peace and love we find.

Margaret Morgan



Making a magic wool angel

MATERIALS

White unspun sheep's wool
Golden gift cord
Sewing kit

Tie off a 35–40 cm (14–16 in) length of white wool roving in the middle with white thread, and leave the end of the thread protruding at the top; it can be used for hanging up the angel. Place a small ball of wool beneath the knot and tie off the head.

Divide a 15 cm (6 in) long piece of roving in half. Use one half for wings and place them between the two wool pieces forming the main body, just below the head.

To make the arms, take the other half of the roving used for the wings, shorten it to 10 cm (4in), fold over the ends and tie them off to make hands. If the arms look too long, you can fold over a longer section for the hands. The aim is to keep the arms within the proportions of the whole angel. Place the arms on top of the wings.

Now tie off the angel again below the wings and arms. Shape the dress and wings into appropriate forms and shorten them if necessary. You might have to use scissors to shape the wings. Then use moistened fingertips to twirl the edges into shape.

Finally, tie a length of golden gift cord crosswise across the chest of the angel (see photograph).



Hazelnut Cinnamon cookies

INGREDIENTS

125 g (4½ oz) butter or margarine
125 g (4½ oz) brown sugar
2 eggs
1 tsp cinnamon
125 g (4½ oz) ground hazelnuts
250 g (8¾ oz) plain white flour

Mix all the ingredients together. At first you can use an electric mixer, then knead everything lightly together to form a dough. Wrap and refrigerate for an hour.

Shape two rolls with a diameter of 4 cm (1½ in) and cut off slices about ½ cm (¼ in) thick. If the dough is not cold enough, the slices will lose their round form and will have to be reshaped by hand.

Place the cookies on a baking tray lined with baking parchment and bake at 180°C (350°F) for 10 minutes. The cookies should be lightly browned.

Story of the Christmas mouse

Finally, finally it was time. We were allowed to help Mum bake Christmas biscuits. First we kneaded the dough from flour, eggs, sugar and a few other ingredients. Unfortunately it had to rest for a whole hour in the fridge. Only then did Felix, Sophie and I get a piece of dough to roll out. It was great fun cutting out all the different shapes.

Of course we all nibbled a bit of dough while we made the biscuits. I think Felix has the

sweetest tooth of us all. He just adores everything sweet and can eat incredible amounts of cake, ice cream and other sweets! As soon as he heard Mum or Dad in the kitchen he would be there asking, 'Is there anything to eat?'

'Well, children, this is our last bit of dough,' said Mum this time.

'But tomorrow and the day after tomorrow and the day after that, will we be allowed to bake again?' all three of us begged.

After the last biscuits of the day were cooked we put them on to a wire rack to cool. Then everyone, even Dad, who hadn't helped at all, was allowed to try one. We carefully placed the rest of the biscuits in a tin and found a good place for it in the larder. We managed to fill quite a few tins during Advent time. Sometimes, before going to sleep, we imagined how good it would feel to be locked into the larder. 'That would be great!' Felix sighed. In any case, we were really looking forward to Christmas morning. Usually our parents liked to sleep a bit longer than us and we ate the biscuits left over from Christmas Eve for breakfast.

Time passed and Christmas had almost arrived. Our house was beautifully decorated and the scent of fir branches filled the rooms. I tried to spy into the living room and discovered that Mum had already put out a plate with biscuits, but I knew I had to wait until the evening. Finally we all sang carols, listened to a story and some poems... but then father noticed that his favourite Christmas biscuits were missing. How could that be?

'I remember putting them in the tin with the golden stars,' Sophie said.

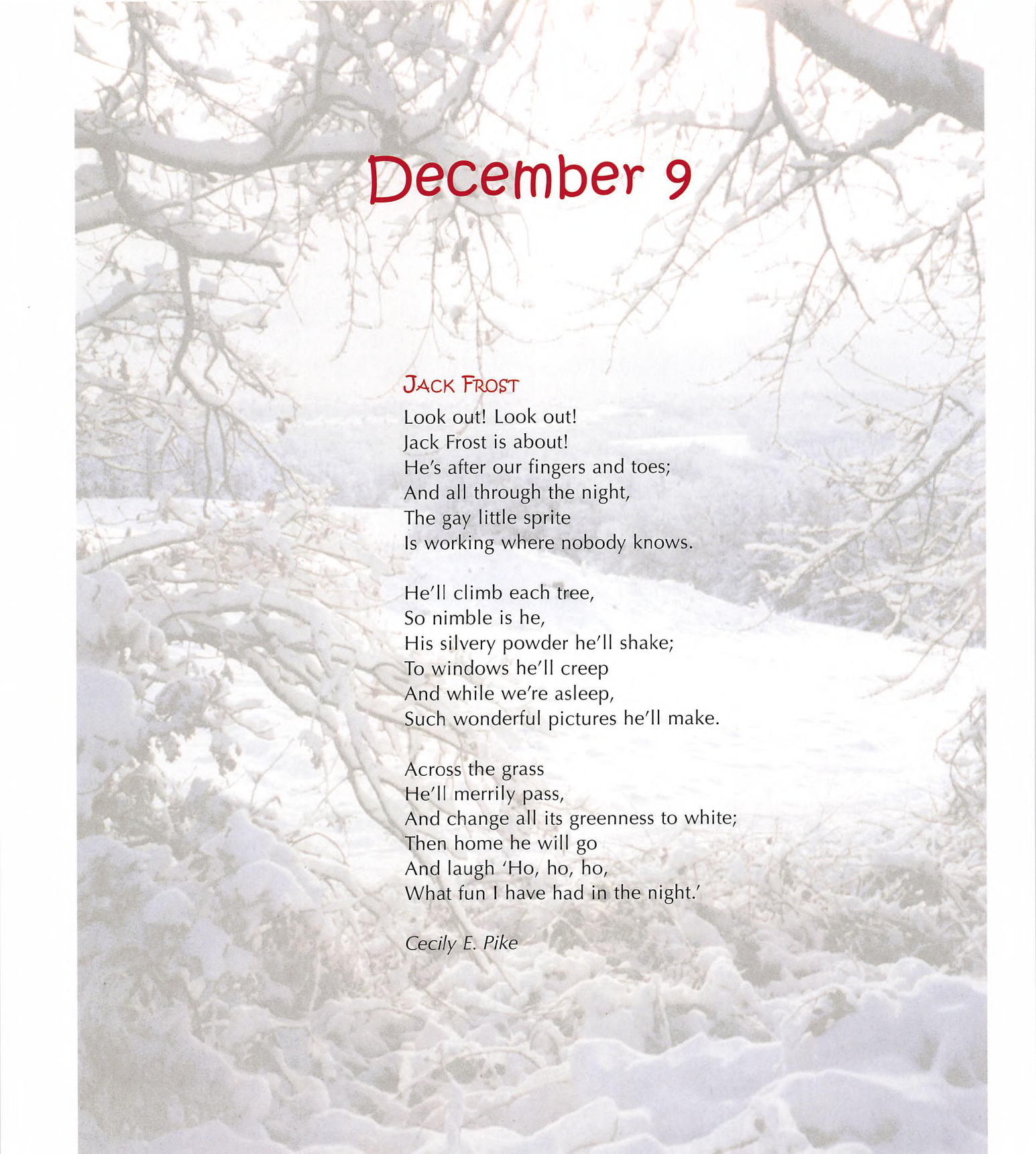
'That's right!' said Mum. 'But there are only a few crumbs left in that tin.'

We all looked at each other and then Felix said, 'I suppose it was the Christmas mouse!'

'Yes, probably,' said Mum. 'And, as everyone knows, Christmas mice only have two legs!'

We all laughed, except Felix, who went quite red in the face.





December 9

JACK FROST

Look out! Look out!
Jack Frost is about!
He's after our fingers and toes;
And all through the night,
The gay little sprite
Is working where nobody knows.

He'll climb each tree,
So nimble is he,
His silvery powder he'll shake;
To windows he'll creep
And while we're asleep,
Such wonderful pictures he'll make.

Across the grass
He'll merrily pass,
And change all its greenness to white;
Then home he will go
And laugh 'Ho, ho, ho,
What fun I have had in the night.'

Cecily E. Pike

Advent muffins

INGREDIENTS FOR 12 MUFFINS

100 g (3½ oz) butter or margarine
1 egg
200 g (7 oz) plain white flour
1 tsp cinnamon
30 g (1 oz) raisins
4 tbsp honey
100 ml (½ cup) milk
2 tsp baking powder
50 g (1¾ oz) ground hazelnuts
1 apple





FOR SPRINKLING

½ tsp cinnamon

1 tbsp sugar

Place the butter/margarine and honey in a saucepan and gently melt over a low heat while stirring.

In a jug, whisk the egg and milk together.

Mix the flour, baking powder and cinnamon and sift into a bowl. Chop the apple into small pieces and add to the bowl, together with the ground hazelnuts and raisins.

Pour the butter and honey mixture and the beaten eggs and milk into the bowl and mix everything together with a tablespoon.

Line a muffin tin with paper cases or grease well, and divide up the dough among them. Mix the sugar and cinnamon and sprinkle over the muffins.

Bake at 180°C (350°F) for 20–25 minutes.

Vanishing game

The players sit in a circle. One of the children leaves the room and waits until he or she is called back. In the meantime, another child hides under a blanket in the middle of the circle. The child waiting outside may come back in, and now everyone sings a song. This is an old German children's song with new words:

Can you tell us who's van- ished, Can you tell us who has

gone? Pl- ease help us ... , A- nd join in the game.

Can you tell us who's vanished,
Can you tell us who has gone?
Please help us ... (*name of the child who's guessing*),
And join in the game.

December 10

IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;
But his mother only, in her maiden bliss,
Worshipped the beloved with a kiss.

What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him: give my heart.

Christina G. Rossetti

Nativity figures: magic wool

Mary and Joseph

MATERIALS

White unspun sheep's wool
Red, blue, purple, brown, yellow and grey
magic wool (wool fleece)
Pipe-cleaners
Sewing kit
Liquid soap

Take a 30–40 cm (12–16 in) length of white wool roving and tie it off in the middle with white thread. Place a small, firm ball of wool beneath the knot and tie off the head.

To make the arms, first wind white wool around a pipe-cleaner until it is completely covered: take very thin strands of wool, about 30 cm (12 in) long, and start at one end of the pipe-cleaner. Bend the ends of the pipe-cleaner over to stop the wound wool from slipping off and to get the desired arm length. Make sure you keep the strand of wool nice and flat to prevent it from twisting itself into a thread, which would result in unattractive rings of wool. Carefully wind a few layers around the pipe-cleaner until you reach the required thickness, bearing in mind that the lower half of the arm is thinner than the upper half. Finally, wind some magic wool the colour of the figure's dress or shirt around the arms, leaving the ends white for the hands. Mary should have a red layer of wool because she's wearing a red dress and Joseph will get a purple layer. Place the finished arms between both halves of wool roving just below the head and tie off the waist below the arms.

To make the rest of the body, first of all decide on the height of your figure. It should be



approximately four times the height of the head. Fold the extra wool roving towards the inside. Take thin layers of white wool and wind them parallel to the outstretched arms right down to the invisible feet. Again, take care to keep the wool flat while winding. Continue until the body is the desired size. The last layer should be wound in the colour of the dress, just like the arms. To cover the shoulders, place a small strip of coloured wool over them and cross these strips at the back and chest. Then proceed to wind flat, thin layers of coloured wool parallel to the outstretched arms down to the feet.

Lay a length of wool in a suitable hair colour across Mary's head, leaving her face free. Sew a parting with saddle-stitch. Plait the hair and, using tiny invisible stitches, sew the plait around her head.

To make Mary's cloak, which is meant to be long and wide and have a hood, tease an oval-shaped piece of wool from blue fleece, about

25 x 18 cm (10 x 7 in). Lay it over the head of the figure, leaving some hair showing at the front. Secure the cloak at the neck.

Joseph is an older man, so his hair and beard have turned grey. Arrange short strands of grey wool in loops and sew the open ends to the head. Do the same with the beard and sew to the face.

His robe may be gathered at the waist with a belt. To make his cloak, take a length of brown wool approximately twice as long as the body (without the head). Divide it in the middle and drape it around the shoulders and arms of the figure. Fold the edges towards the inside and secure them by rubbing between moistened fingertips.

Brown wool is also needed for Joseph's hat. Tease a 10 x 10 cm (4 x 4 in) square and dip this into water, which should be as hot as possible.

Then add some soap to the wool and rub between your fingertips. While doing this, make a small dent in the middle for the head, making sure that no hole appears.

Repeat this procedure until the wool is felted together. After drying the felted piece of material, trim at the edges so you have a round hat with an indentation for the head in the middle. Sew the hat to Joseph's head with a few stitches. Fasten a small twig to his hand for a staff.

Origins of the nativity scene

In many Christian families it is traditional to make a nativity scene at home. This idea goes back to St Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan Order. He was a great friend of all animals and called them his brothers and sisters. It is believed that in 1223 he built a wooden stable where his ox and donkey lived. He also asked a couple with their small baby to come and stay there, and they were happy to and laid their baby in the manger. After a midnight mass he led the people of Assisi to this stable so they could witness and understand the secret of Christmas.

Nowadays it has become quite common in many countries to create a nativity scene. Originally there were only the figures of Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus, as well as the ox and the donkey. Over time people have added different kinds of figures. In western culture these are mostly the shepherds, sheep and the three kings. Other countries that have different local animals include them in the stable scene as well, so you would see llamas in Bolivia. Regional variations the world over tend to be mirrored both in the dress of the figures and the landscapes that are created around the stable.





Butter biscuits

INGREDIENTS

250 g (8¾ oz) plain white flour
150 g (5¼ oz) cold butter
100 g (3½ oz) sugar
½ tsp vanilla extract
3 egg yolks

Mix all the ingredients together and knead into a firm dough. Wrap and refrigerate for half an hour. Roll out the dough on a floured surface. Dip the

cutters into flour and cut out shapes. Use a knife or spatula to carefully loosen the biscuits from the surface and place on a baking tray lined with baking parchment. The biscuits can be coated with some beaten egg yolk before baking.

Bake at 180°C (350°F) for 10 minutes.

TIP

Cut out round shapes from part of the dough and make into walnut chocolates (see page 59).

December 11

THE ANGEL GABRIEL

The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
His wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame:
'All hail,' said he, 'thou lowly maiden Mary,
Most highly favoured lady.' Gloria!

'For known a blessed mother thou shalt be;
All generations laud and honour thee:
Thy son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold,
Most highly favoured lady.' Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head;
'To me be as it pleaseth God,' she said.
'My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name.'
Most highly favoured lady. Gloria!

Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born,
In Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn;
And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say:
'Most highly favoured lady.' Gloria!

Traditional Basque carol, translated by Sabine Baring-Gould



Walnut chocolates

INGREDIENTS

125 g (4½ oz) plain white flour
75 g (2⅔ oz) cold butter or margarine
50 g (1¾ oz) sugar
2 egg yolks
250 g (8¾ oz) marzipan
15 g (½ oz) butter
100 g (3½ oz) dark chocolate
Walnut halves

Make a sweet pastry from the flour, butter/margarine, sugar and egg yolk and knead lightly. Wrap in aluminium foil and refrigerate for half an hour.

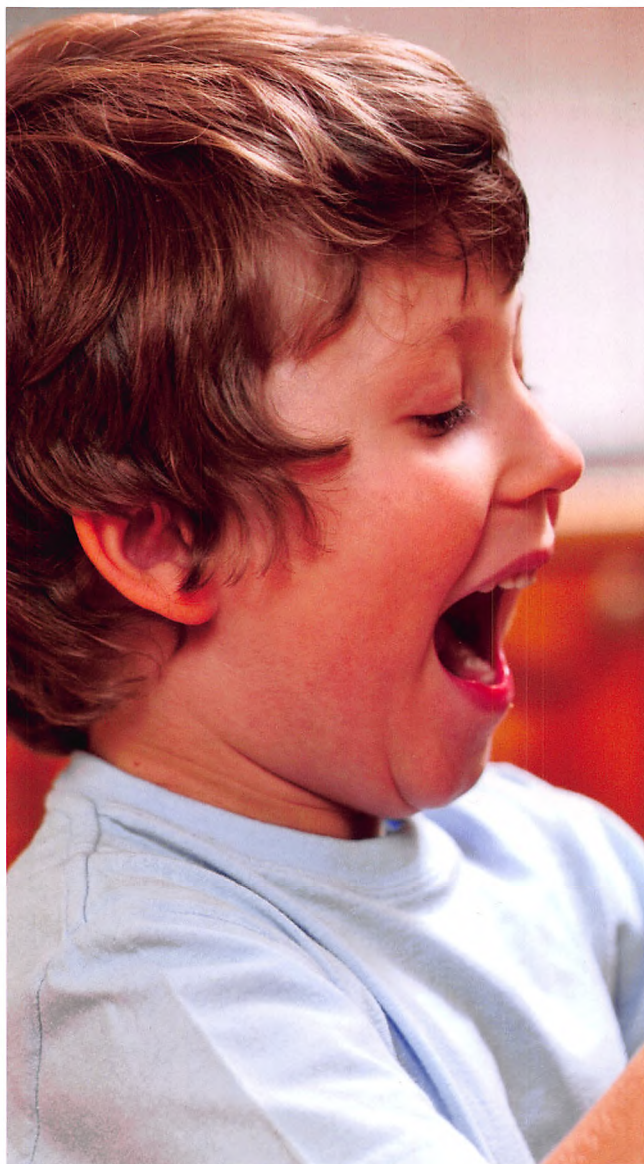
Roll out thinly on a floured surface. Dip round cutters (with a diameter of approximately 3 cm,

1¼ in) into flour and then cut out round biscuits. With the help of a knife, lift them off the surface and place on a baking tray lined with baking parchment.

Bake at 180°C (350°F) for 10 minutes.

When the biscuits are completely cool, shape small balls from the marzipan (this is best done with moistened hands) and press on to the biscuits, making sure the marzipan covers the sides as well.

To make the icing, warm up the butter over a gentle heat. Add the chocolate and stir until melted. Using a pastry brush, coat the biscuits with the chocolate icing and decorate with a walnut half each.



Guessing food game

Without speaking, one player should attempt to mime what and how he or she is eating, for example ice cream (licking), spaghetti (with a spoon and fork), boiled egg (opening it and spooning it out), carrots (nibbling), a burger (taking a bite with mouth wide open), an apple (taking a bite), yoghurt (with a spoon), eating with chopsticks, and so on. The other players have to guess what food is being eaten. Whoever guesses correctly may have the next turn at miming.

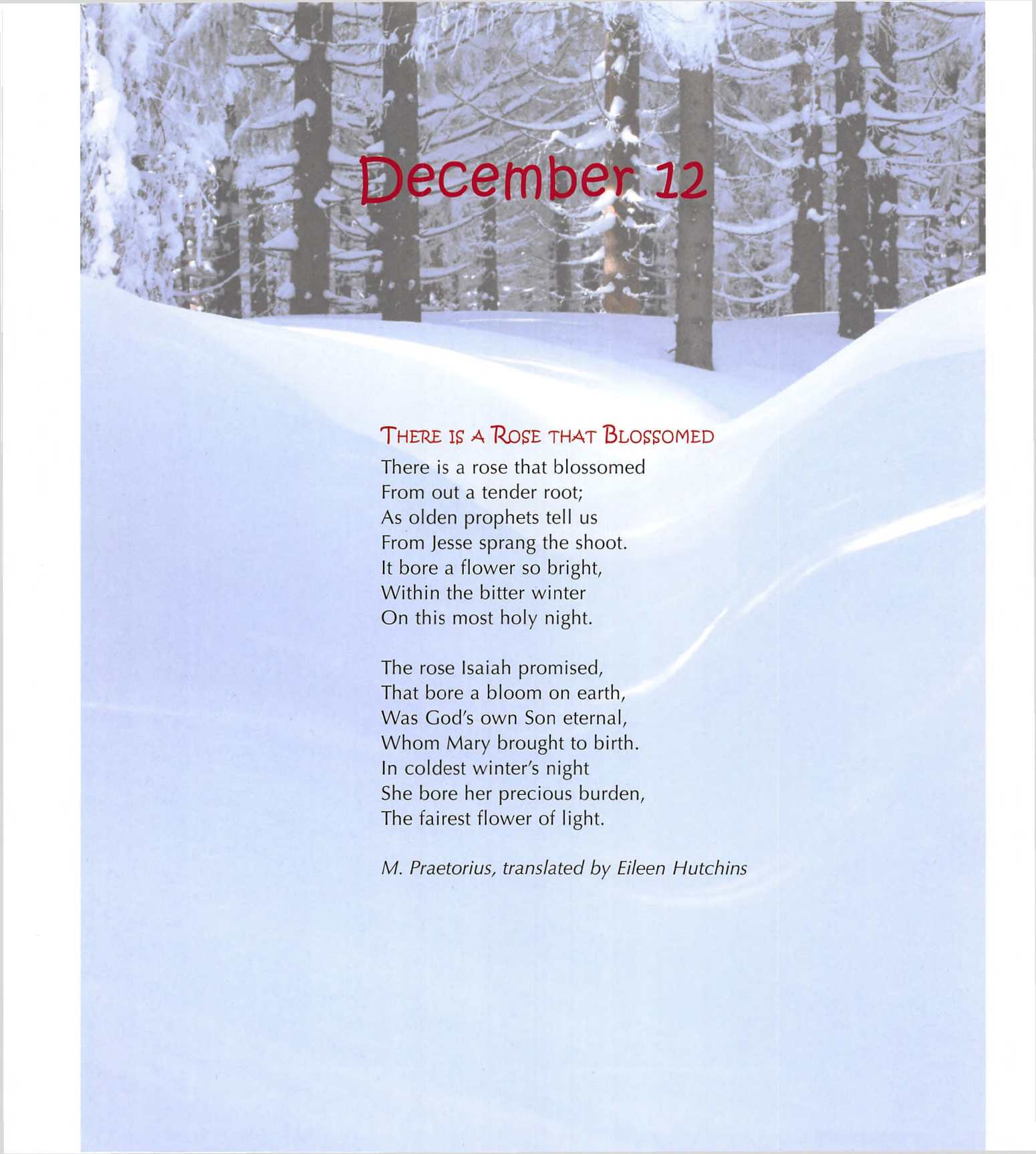
This simple game can be played practically anywhere, for example, to keep children entertained while waiting for something. But you can also play it with a group of children in a circle.

Riddle

Can you guess what's being described in this riddle? You'll find the answer on page 142.

My life can be measured in hours,
I serve by being devoured.
Thin, I am quick;
Fat, I am slow.
Wind is my foe.





December 12

THERE IS A ROSE THAT BLOSSOMED

There is a rose that blossomed
From out a tender root;
As olden prophets tell us
From Jesse sprang the shoot.
It bore a flower so bright,
Within the bitter winter
On this most holy night.

The rose Isaiah promised,
That bore a bloom on earth,
Was God's own Son eternal,
Whom Mary brought to birth.
In coldest winter's night
She bore her precious burden,
The fairest flower of light.

M. Praetorius, translated by Eileen Hutchins



Hibernating pear cake

INGREDIENTS FOR THE BASE

- 3 eggs
- 3 tbsp hot water
- 150 g (5¼ oz) sugar
- 150 g (5¼ oz) plain white flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 2 tsp cocoa powder

INGREDIENTS FOR THE TOPPING

- 1 tin of pears
- 500 ml (½ quart) double cream
- 50–100 g (1¾–3½ oz) chocolate flakes

Beat the eggs together with the water and sugar until fluffy.

Slowly fold in the flour mixed with baking powder and the cocoa powder.

Pour into a greased round baking tin and bake at 170°C (340°F) for 20–25 minutes.

Drain the pears and arrange them on the cooled base in a star pattern with the thin ends of the pears pointing towards the edge of the cake.

Whip the cream until stiff and spread it over the pears as 'snow'. The pears are now hibernating for the winter!

Finally, sprinkle chocolate flakes around the edge. Refrigerate before serving.

Story of the Christmas rose

It was icy cold. A bitter wind was whistling through every buttonhole. The earth was frozen hard and covered with patches of crusty snow. In weather like this it was best to stay at home by the fireside. Samuel, the shepherd boy, had overheard people talking about the birth of a child in a stable quite near his home. His thoughts kept wandering: imagine, in a stable in the middle of winter, in this freezing cold weather! He had been born in summer, when the roses were flowering. But now... everything was so grey and cold.

When Samuel was born, so his parents had told him, friends and neighbours came to bring presents and flowers and to share their happiness about the birth of the new child. 'I wonder if the child in the stable gets any visitors?' the shepherd boy asked himself. Apparently the parents were not from this area and didn't know anybody.

Samuel very much wished to go and visit the new baby in the stable. 'I just want to make sure it's all right,' he thought. So he decided to set off.

He wrapped his warm fur coat tightly around him to keep the wind out. He kept his face turned to the ground.

All of a sudden he noticed something bright under a tree, something that looked like a flower. 'In the middle of winter!' he thought. 'That can't be true!'

He ran towards it to have a better look. And, truly, set on a sturdy stem there was a white flower with five petals. It looked like a five-pointed star. Samuel picked the small blossom and hurried on.

Finally he arrived at the stable and stood before the baby, who was lying in a manger. Samuel held the flower in his hand. Just as he was carefully placing it beside the child in the manger, a small bright golden sun appeared in its centre.

Ever since that day, this flower, which blossoms each year at Christmas time, has been called the Christmas rose.



A photograph of a winter scene. In the foreground, a black lamppost with a glass-enclosed light fixture stands on a snow-covered path. The background is filled with bare, snow-laden trees and evergreens, creating a serene and cold atmosphere. The sky is overcast and white with snow.

December 13

CHRISTMAS POEM

Above the manger stood a star
A star all wondrous white
And all about His lowly bed
There welled a flood of light.

It bathed the stable in its glow
It shone round Mary's head
And on the kneeling shepherds' cloaks
Its radiant beams were shed.

Star of the world, through time and space
It flames in glory bright
To make man's pilgrimage through the years
A pathway of light.

Traditional

Star lantern

MATERIALS

Paper, painted with watercolours 26 x 26 cm
(10 x 10 in)

Ruler

Scissors

Cooking oil and scented oil

Brush

Cotton rag

Tea light in a glass holder

Using a protractor, cut a 26 x 26 cm (10 x 10 in) square from a painted sheet of paper. Using a brush, coat the paper sparingly with oil and then rub the oil in with a rag. This will cause the colours to blend even more and the paper will become transparent. Now leave it to dry for a few hours until it is ready to be folded.

Fold the paper in half to make a triangle and then fold again to get a smaller triangle. Open and fold into a rectangle and then into a small square. Open it back to the rectangle and double the folds leading to the centre by carefully folding the edges towards the existing folds. Now you have a star pattern with eight folds in each half – sixteen all together. Cut the four corners as shown in the illustration to create an even octagon.

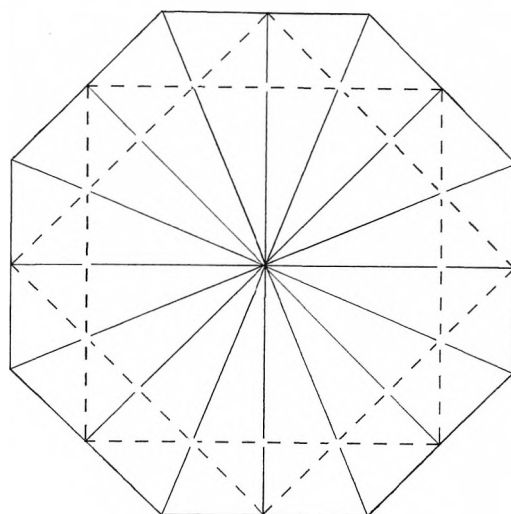
Now fold each side of the octagon towards the middle until the two short neighbouring sides of the octagon are flush with two lines of a quarter of the previously created star pattern (see illustration, the folds are shown with a dashed line).

The next step is a little complicated and needs extra care. Place the paper in front of you with the painted side underneath. Using both hands, take two neighbouring corners of the octagon and fold



them towards the inside, while the corner that's created gets folded towards the outside. This is how the star shape of the lantern is created. Now you can no longer lay the paper flat on the table. Once all corners have been folded towards the inside and the outside, press the whole lantern gently on to the table to create the flat area at the bottom where the tea light will sit.

To avoid starting a fire, place the tea light in a glass holder, and never leave the lantern unattended while lit!





Chocolate peanut crunchies

INGREDIENTS

150 g (5¼ oz) roasted peanuts, lightly salted
100 g (3½ oz) milk chocolate
15 g (½ oz) butter

In a saucepan, melt the butter over a gentle heat. Add the chocolate while stirring continuously. Remove the pan from the heat.

Rub the salted peanuts between two layers of paper kitchen towel or in a tea towel to remove the coarse grains of salt, then add them to the melted chocolate and stir in.

Use a teaspoon to portion elongated portions of the mixture on to a baking tray lined with baking parchment and set aside in a cool place.

Once the chocolate has hardened, store the crunchies in a plastic container in the fridge.

Legend of St Lucy

‘Mum, Mum!’ Joanna called from the garden gate. ‘Mum!’

‘What’s wrong, what’s happened?’ Mum asked and hurried towards her.

‘Bridget’s baby’s been born!’

‘Really? What wonderful news!’

‘Yes, and now they are home and I was allowed to hold it in my arms!’ Joanna continued.

‘How lovely. Tell me, what does the baby look like?’

‘Oh, she is so small and tiny... and her hands are teeny-weeny... and she’s called Lucy.’

‘Lucy? That’s a beautiful name. I think I know the legend of St Lucy.’

'What's a legend, Mum?'

'It's the story of a good person who lived a long time ago.'

'Can you tell me the legend of St Lucy?'

'Yes, of course. Come in then!'

They went inside and settled on the sofa and, after lighting a candle, Mum began...

A very long time ago, in the third century, Lucy was born in the town of Syracuse on the island of Sicily, which is in southern Italy. Soon after her birth, her father died. He left her a considerable fortune and she was able to grow up without any worries and with everything she could ever need. Lucy was very beautiful and everywhere she went she was welcomed. She was engaged to a rich man named Philippus and a large wedding dowry was put aside for her.

But then it so happened that Lucy's mother became very sick. No medicinal herbs, not one of the doctors called to her bedside were able to cure her. One evening, when Lucy was kneeling beside her mother's bed, they both decided to make a pilgrimage to the grave of St Agatha in Catania, hoping she would be able to help.

So they travelled to Catania together and spent a long time praying at St Agatha's tomb. By the time they were leaving it had grown quite dark, and all of a sudden a bright, shining figure stood before Lucy.

It was Agatha who said, 'Lucy, my dear sister, why are you asking me to help your mother? See, your faith has made her well again.'

From this moment onwards the mother was cured and she and her daughter became devout Christians. Lucy decided not to marry and to give her dowry to the poor instead.

Philippus, who still believed in the old pagan

religion, was disappointed to lose his bride. Indeed, he was very upset that she had become a Christian. Knowing that Christians were persecuted, he reported her to the prefect of the town, Paschasinus. Lucy was ordered to bring an offering to the old pagan gods, but she refused.

'Never,' said she. 'You may fear your lord but I fear only my Lord and my God.' Paschasinus threatened to have her tortured but Lucy was not afraid.

So Paschasinus gave the order to have her taken away, but the guards found that she was as stiff and heavy as a mountain and not even a thousand men could move her. Then they tried burning her, but the flames, too, did her no harm. Only a sword thrust through her throat injured her, and before she died she said, 'Just like my sister Agatha is protecting Catania, I will watch over and guard Syracuse.'

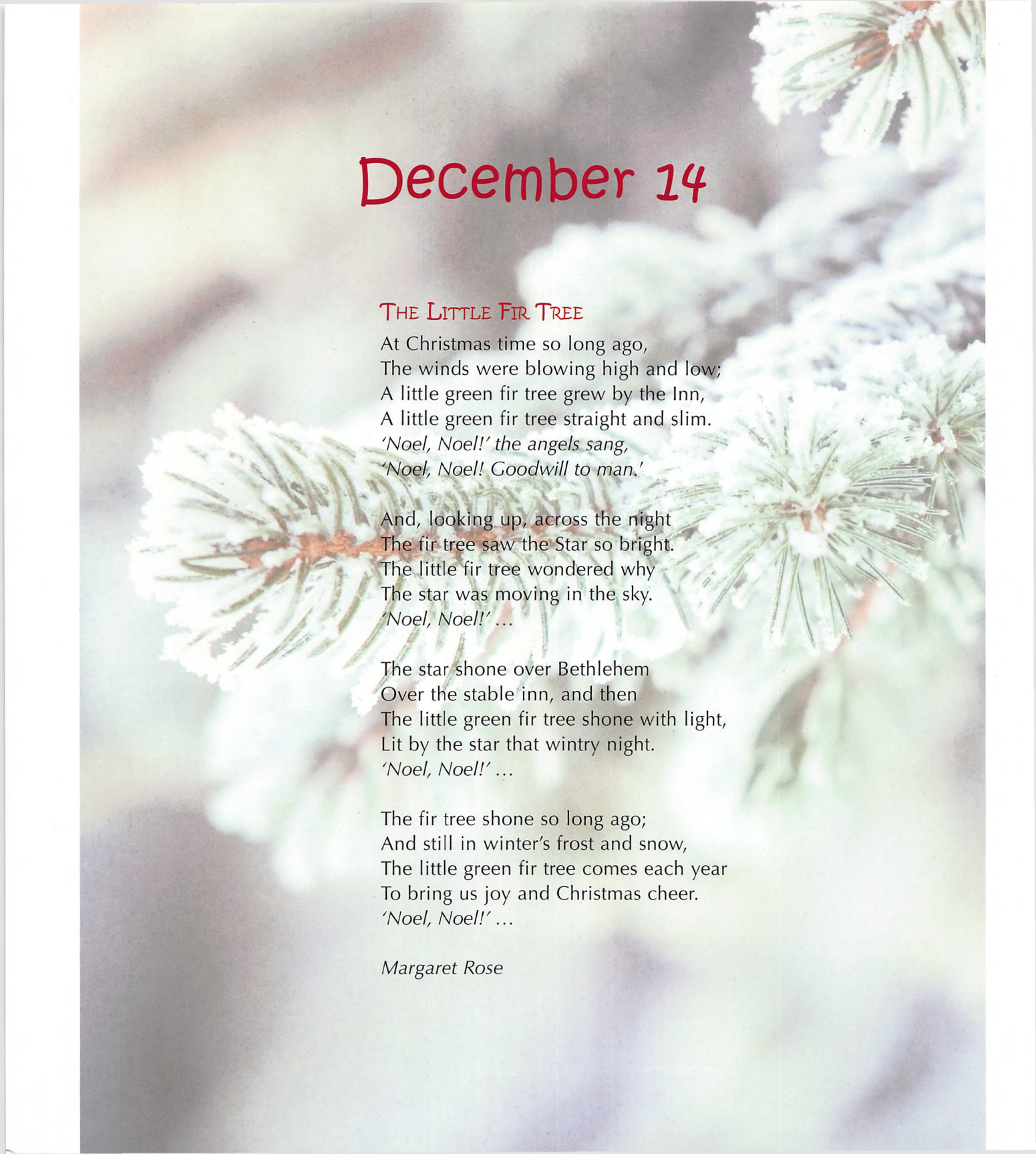
The people of Sicily built a church in the place where she died, so they could pray to St Lucy there...

'What did St Lucy look like?' Joanna asked her mother.

'She is supposed to have been very beautiful and many painters have portrayed her holding a candle. Lucy means 'light', you see.'

'You know what?' Joanna beamed. 'We could give Bridget's little Lucy a nice big candle as a present.'

'That's a very good idea indeed. Let's do that,' Mum agreed.



December 14

THE LITTLE FIR TREE

At Christmas time so long ago,
The winds were blowing high and low;
A little green fir tree grew by the Inn,
A little green fir tree straight and slim.
'Noel, Noel!' the angels sang,
'Noel, Noel! Goodwill to man.'

And, looking up, across the night
The fir tree saw the Star so bright.
The little fir tree wondered why
The star was moving in the sky.
'Noel, Noel!' ...

The star shone over Bethlehem
Over the stable inn, and then
The little green fir tree shone with light,
Lit by the star that wintry night.
'Noel, Noel!' ...

The fir tree shone so long ago;
And still in winter's frost and snow,
The little green fir tree comes each year
To bring us joy and Christmas cheer.
'Noel, Noel!' ...

Margaret Rose



Hot spiced oranges

INGREDIENTS

- 1 kg (2¼ lb) oranges
- 200 ml (¾–1 cup) orange or apple juice
- 2 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- ¼ tsp vanilla seeds (from pod) or ½ tsp vanilla extract

Peel the oranges thoroughly and divide into segments. Cut these in half again lengthwise using a sharp kitchen knife. Arrange the segments in a fan shape in a quiche dish.

Put the juice, sugar, cinnamon and vanilla into a jug, mix thoroughly and pour over the oranges.

Bake in a preheated oven at 220°C (430°F) for 15–20 minutes. Serve with vanilla ice cream or whipped cream.



History of the Christmas tree

People from the old Germanic tribes used to decorate their houses with evergreen twigs and branches during the Holy Nights between December 24 and January 6. They would hang them above the entrance, suspend them from the ceiling or put them in a corner of the room to ward off bad spirits. The greenery also symbolised vitality and immortality.

From the fifteenth century onwards, people began to place whole trees in their homes. Over

time, the trees were decorated, first with biscuits, later on with candles, red apples and golden nuts.

Nowadays, Christmas without a fir tree is unimaginable. It has become the most popular symbol of this winter festival and it still evokes a mood of fascination and wonder. Usually presents are placed under the tree and it is often the centre of festivities.

People emigrating from Europe have spread the custom of the Christmas tree to many parts of the

world. These days Christmas trees in Germany are traditionally decorated with straw stars (as a reminder of the straw in the manger), red apples (to symbolise the fruit of the tree of knowledge in the garden of Eden), candles (to represent Christ the light of the world) and with colourful glass baubles (symbols of beauty and wholeness). Baubles and modern decorations sometimes replace the traditional apples and golden nuts. In some regions people add tinsel, wooden or beeswax figures and sweets.

Riddle

Can you guess what's being described in this riddle? You'll find the answer on page 142.

Green shelter for creatures
Every month of the year.
At Christmas the children
Love its lights, bright and clear.



December 15

THE SHEPHERD'S SONG

Once upon a starry midnight
Stood I upon a mountain,
Silver-grey the silent sheep
Slumbering, slumbering,
Slumbering so deep,
Among the hills so fair.

Quietly the vault above me
Opened like the rose in summer:
Rainbow light streamed through its crown
Glimmering, glistening,
Jewelling all down,
Among the hills so fair.

Winging through the midnight splendour
Angels with chanting voices,
Songs of joy and songs of birth
Carolling, carolling:
Joy to all the earth,
Among the hills so fair.

Gladly then I turned my footsteps
Down to the straw-bright cradle;
There I danced with heart-filled glee,
Merrily, merrily,
Merrily, merrily,
Among the hills so fair.

Brien Masters

Nativity figures: magic wool shepherds

MATERIALS

White unspun sheep's wool
Magic wool (wool fleece) in green, grey and
various shades of brown
Pipe-cleaners
Sewing kit

Start the figures as described in the instructions for Mary and Joseph (see page 55). The shepherds' gowns are made in brown or green shades. Their cloaks are partly frayed and do not cover their bodies completely. They have shoulder-length hair and some have a beard. Their hats are felted



much like Joseph's hat but without a large brim. The shepherds may hold a little lamb in their arms (see instructions page 24) or carry a crook or a bag.

To make a bag, take a dark green strip of wool, fold it like a bag and sew it up at the sides. Use a tree bud or a small piece of wood for a button. Sew a long shoulder strap to the bag and put it over the shepherd's shoulder.



Date macaroons

INGREDIENTS

125 g (4½ oz) butter or margarine
250 g (8¾ oz) oats
100 g (3½ oz) honey
2 eggs
200 g (7 oz) stoned dates
50–100 g (1¾–3½ oz) plain white flour
½ tsp baking powder
70 thin wafers, 4.5 cm (1¾ in) diameter

Melt the butter/margarine in a pan and pour over the oats.

In a bowl, whisk the eggs and honey together until fluffy. Add the chopped dates, cooled oats and baking powder. Let the mixture soak for 15 minutes. If necessary, add some flour – the mixture should not be runny.

Lay out the wafers on baking trays. Use a teaspoon to portion out small amounts of the macaroon mixture on to the oblates.

Bake in a preheated oven at 180°C (350°F) for 15–20 minutes.

Torch detective game

During the winter months when it gets dark early, this is a good game to play indoors with a group of children.

One player decides on an object in the room and remembers it or writes it down on a piece of paper. Then all the lights are switched off.

The detective shines her torch on to various objects, trying to guess which one the other player has chosen.

Once it has been correctly guessed, two other children may have a turn. The game is played until everyone has had a go.

Riddle

Can you guess what's being described in this riddle? You'll find the answer on page 142.

White bird, featherless,
Flying out of paradise,
Flying over sea and land,
Dying in my hand.

December 16

GREEN GROW' TH THE HOLLY

Green grow' th the holly,
So doth the ivy.
Though winter blasts blow na' er so high,
Green grow' th the holly.

Gay are the flowers,
Hedgerows and ploughlands.
The days grow longer in the sun,
Soft fall the showers.

Full gold the harvest,
Grain for thy labour.
With God must work for daily bread
Else, man, thou starvest.

Fast fall the shed leaves,
Russet and yellow,
But resting buds are smug and safe
Where swung the dead leaves.

Green grow' th the holly,
So doth the ivy.
The God of life can never die.
Hope! saith the holly.

Attributed to King Henry VIII of England

Chocolate coconut truffles

INGREDIENTS

125 ml (½ cup) double (heavy) cream
50 g (2 oz) butter
200 g (7 oz) white chocolate
150–175 g (5¼–6 oz) desiccated coconut
Pinch of salt

Heat up the butter with the cream over a medium heat. Slowly add the chocolate. When the chocolate is melted, stir in 125 g (4⅓ oz) of the desiccated coconut. Let the mixture cool slowly.

Then form small round truffles with your hands and roll them in the remainder of the coconut.

Store the truffles in the fridge and keep for up to two weeks.



Story of searching for Father Christmas

Dawn was eight years old. She had curly hair, blue eyes and a teddy bear named Bruno. Today Dawn was very sad because her parents had been arguing again. She didn't know exactly why, but who cared. When Mum and Dad were shouting at each other, Dawn always got a sore tummy and she just wanted to run away.

As she was sitting there with Bruno under her arm – at least he gave her a little comfort – she suddenly came up with a good idea. Mrs Fisher, Dawn's teacher, had been speaking to the children about Christmas earlier today. There were only three weeks left until Christmas Day after all. So in class they had been talking about why we receive presents at Christmas, who brings them, and where Father Christmas could possibly be found. David knew the answer: the spirit of Father Christmas is everywhere, and if we just look carefully, we can see him with our own eyes. That's what his Granny had told him anyhow.

Dawn quickly made up her mind now: she wanted to go into town to look for Father Christmas and tell him her biggest wish – she wished so much that her parents would stop arguing.

'I'm going out to play,' she told Mum and slammed the door shut. She knew the way to the town centre by bus all right, because her granny lived there and Dawn was already allowed to visit her on her own. On the way there she watched how an older woman, who was not wearing the nicest clothes, wanted to get on the bus too, but she didn't have the right change. The bus driver just said something in a grumpy voice. Dawn

couldn't understand what he said, but from his face and gestures she gathered it was far from friendly. No, she definitely wouldn't find the spirit of Father Christmas here, Dawn thought.

She got off at the bus stop where she usually got off to visit her grandmother. But today she walked passed Granny's house and strolled down the pedestrian precinct. She stopped at the waffle stand. Granny often bought her a hot waffle here. But today Dawn didn't have any money with her so she couldn't buy one. It was cold and her hands and feet were slowly freezing.

The woman at the waffle stall called out to her, 'Well, little one, would you like a waffle?'

'I'd love one, but I have no money.'

'Then you get one for free today!'

'Oh, thank you!' Dawn called out happily.

The waffle didn't only warm up her tummy but also her hands. As she was eating she walked on, round one corner and further and then round another corner. Lots of people passed Dawn but no one seemed to notice her. Dawn, on the other hand, watched everyone carefully and continued to look for Father Christmas.

Meanwhile it had grown late and the street lamps were already burning. The town was still crowded and everyone seemed busy. Dawn should have been home a long time ago; in fact, she should never have come into town on her own. Her mother was very worried. She had called around, asking Granny and even David from Dawn's class if they had seen Dawn, but nobody had seen her or knew where she could be. Mum started crying. 'I think I'm going to call the police now,' Dad said.

Dawn realised that it was not so easy to find Father Christmas. Now she just wanted to get home. The bus stop should be at the next crossing.

But there was just another square. Maybe if she walked up the next street... but there was no bus stop there either. Now Dawn realised she was lost and she couldn't find her way back home. She suddenly felt quite lonely among all the people. If only she had brought Bruno along.

'Hello, who have we got here?' She heard the deep voice of a policeman, who was standing right in front of her.

'I'm Dawn Templeton and I think I'm lost.'

'Hmm,' the policeman answered. 'I'll need to speak to a colleague from the police station.' He dialled a number on his mobile and talked for a while. 'A colleague of mine is coming in his police car and we'll take you back to your parents,' he told Dawn. 'They're waiting and they're very worried about you.'

When Dawn finally got home, Mum gave her a big hug. She wasn't cross at all. 'Sweetheart, I'm so glad you're back! But where on earth have you been?' Mum asked, and she sounded like she had a cold.

'I was in town, and I was looking for Father Christmas.'

'Father Christmas? Why?'

'Because, because... ' Dawn stuttered and tears burst from her eyes. 'Because I wanted to tell him my wish, that... that you would stop arguing so much.'

Dad put his arms around both of them, and they hugged for a while.

'You know, during the last weeks everything got a bit too much for your mum and me. It's true that we were arguing more than usual and we didn't even notice how difficult it must have been for you. We'll make sure it doesn't happen so often any more,' Dad said. Dawn was happy because she knew she could trust her dad.



Riddle

Can you guess what's being described in this riddle? You'll find the answer on page 142.

For engine and wheel there is no need –
Still I go at a good fast speed.

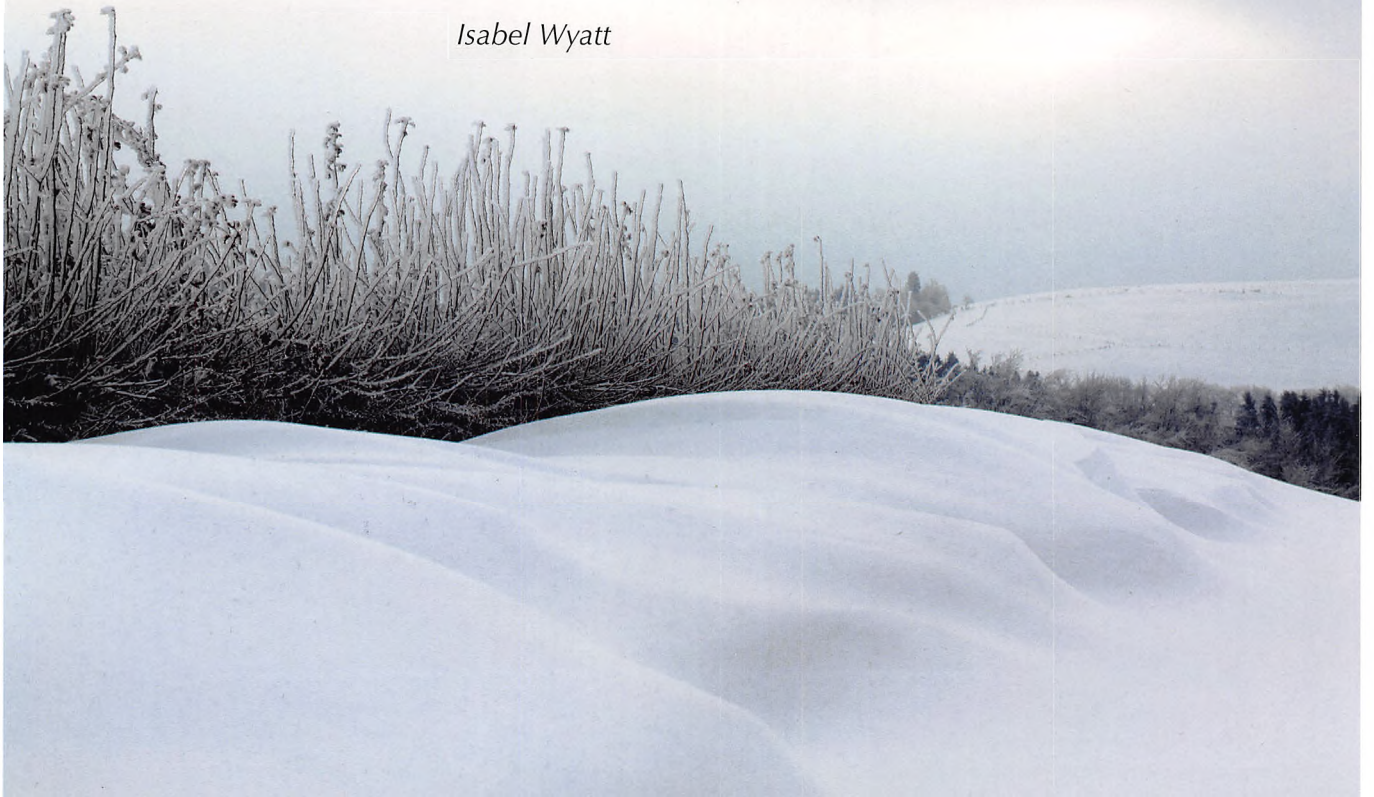
December 17

THE TREE AGAINST THE SKY

The Christmas tree, against the night
Beyond the window bars,
Stood bright with flames of candlelight
Before a sky of stars.

I stood and stared, till suddenly
It seemed to me that I
Saw stars alight upon the tree
And candles in the sky!

Isabel Wyatt

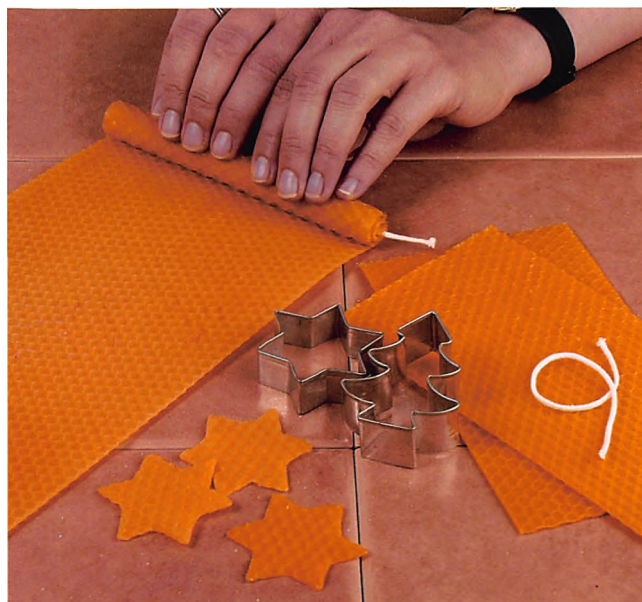


Making beeswax candles

MATERIALS

Beeswax sheets
Candle wick
Scissors
Sharp knife
Biscuit cutters

Making candles from beeswax sheets is not very difficult. Beeswax sheets are readily available in various sizes (try searching online or see page 144 for a list of suppliers), or you can cut them to the desired size. You can make both thin candles for the tree and thick decorative candles for an Advent wreath or table decoration. For thicker candles two or more beeswax sheets are rolled around a candle wick one after the other.



Beeswax sheets are very brittle so it's important to warm them up beforehand. Lay them near a heater for a while and, before continuing, check to see whether the sheet has become soft and supple. A wooden board or the kitchen counter is as a suitable surface to work on.

Make sure the thickness of the wick matches the thickness of the candle you wish to make. Thinner candles need a thin wick and thicker candles need a thicker wick. Roll the wick so that it's sticking out of one end of the beeswax sheet. It's important to note which is the lighting end of the wick; usually there's a knot at the bottom end of the wick.

To finish the candle, firmly press down the edge of the beeswax sheet to prevent it from unrolling.

Biscuit cutters can easily be pressed into the wax sheets to cut out shapes. You can warm up these shapes in your hands and then stick them to the candles as decoration. You can also thread a thin golden gift cord through the cut-out beeswax shapes and use them as gift tags or tree decorations.



Marzipan balls

INGREDIENTS

250 g (8¾ oz) marzipan
2 tsp cocoa powder
2 tsp cinnamon

Cut the marzipan into cubes with sides of approximately 2 cm (¾ in). Make the cubes into round balls. This works best if your hands are moist.

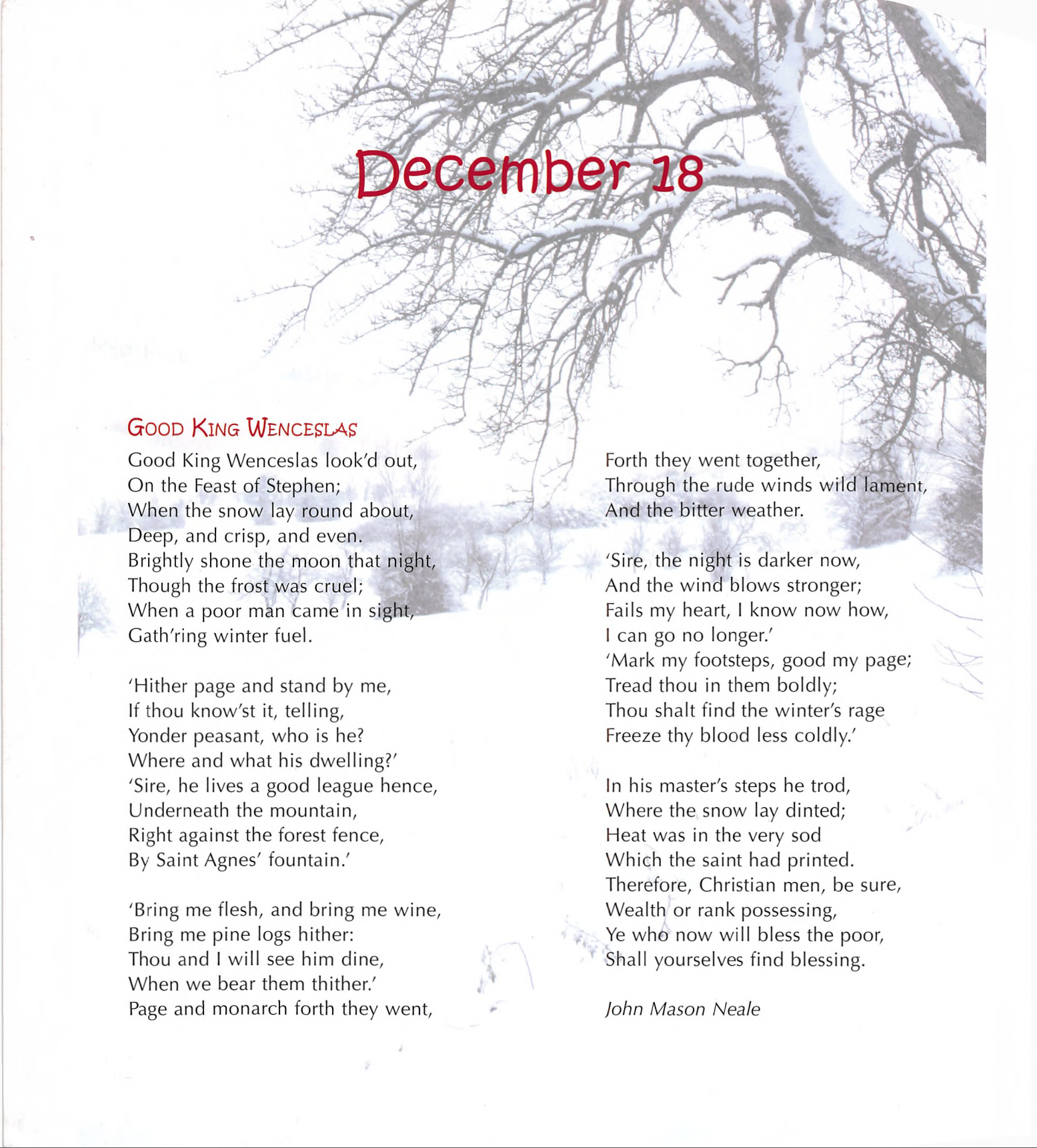
Mix the cinnamon and cocoa powder on a saucer or in a small bowl, and roll the marzipan balls in the mixture.

Baking pizza game (for young children)

The child should lie on his stomach over an adult's knees ready for the 'pizza baking'.

First the adult kneads the child's back, then smooths out the 'dough' with a flat hand. Next the adult spread the 'tomato sauce' with two fingers. This is followed by 'peppers, onions, salami' and so on – the adult lightly presses an index finger on to various points of the child's back. Next 'grated cheese' is sprinkled over the whole pizza – the adult taps all their fingers across the child's back. Now the pizza is 'shoved into the oven' – sway your legs from side to side. The 'pizza' gets eaten with accompanying noises from the adult, while lightly pinching the child's back.

This game is very popular with young children, and you might have to repeat it many times! Of course you may think of further 'ingredients' for the pizza.



December 18

GOOD KING WENCESLAS

Good King Wenceslas look'd out,
On the Feast of Stephen;
When the snow lay round about,
Deep, and crisp, and even.
Brightly shone the moon that night,
Though the frost was cruel;
When a poor man came in sight,
Gath'ring winter fuel.

'Hither page and stand by me,
If thou know'st it, telling,
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?'
'Sire, he lives a good league hence,
Underneath the mountain,
Right against the forest fence,
By Saint Agnes' fountain.'

'Bring me flesh, and bring me wine,
Bring me pine logs hither:
Thou and I will see him dine,
When we bear them thither.'
Page and monarch forth they went,

Forth they went together,
Through the rude winds wild lament,
And the bitter weather.

'Sire, the night is darker now,
And the wind blows stronger;
Fails my heart, I know now how,
I can go no longer.'
'Mark my footsteps, good my page;
Tread thou in them boldly;
Thou shalt find the winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly.'

In his master's steps he trod,
Where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod
Which the saint had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure,
Wealth or rank possessing,
Ye who now will bless the poor,
Shall yourselves find blessing.

John Mason Neale

Making Christmas cards

MATERIALS

Corrugated or coloured cardboard
Hessian or raffia ribbon
Handmade paper
Dried orange slices
Stars or hearts made from beeswax sheets
Cinnamon stick, star anise or other spices
Old sheet music
Golden gift cord
Glue, scissors
Gift tags without the cord (see page 102)

Fold the short side of a sheet of coloured card (approximately 11 cm, 4¼ in wide) and cut along the edge. You can cut three cards approximately 16 cm (6¼ in) high from this one long folded piece. These can now be decorated individually using the above material suggestions (see the illustrations for ideas). Do not glue more than three layers on top of each other, otherwise the card will turn out too thick and will not fit into an envelope. Put a folded sheet of paper inside your cards for writing on – the recipient might want to reuse the card!

You can also make the envelope yourself. Unfold an envelope to use as a template. Copy the shape on to strong paper in a colour shade matching your card and cut it out. Fold all four corners and glue the lower part to the two adjoining corners (see illustration). Envelopes can also be made from old calendar sheets or thick wrapping paper.





Orange slice

INGREDIENTS

4 eggs
250 g (8¾ oz) margarine
250 g (8¾ oz) sugar
1 tsp vanilla essence
250 ml (1 cup) freshly squeezed orange juice
300 g (10½ oz) plain white flour
3 level tsp baking powder

Beat the eggs together with the sugar, vanilla essence and the margarine until fluffy. Add the orange juice.

Sift the flour and baking powder together and carefully fold into the mixture.

Spread the dough on to a greased shallow baking tray and bake at 175°C (350°F) for 25–30 minutes.



Christmas celebrations around the world

For many people around the world Christmas is the most popular and enjoyable festival of the year. It is celebrated in more than 140 countries and in the various local regions there are many different customs associated with this season. In some countries people are very poor and, compared to our western cultures, quite different things are regarded as special. Yet the birth of the Jesus Christ is always the main focus. Nearly everywhere people like to gather with family and friends and prepare delicious food.

In the early days of Christianity people celebrated Christmas on January 6. But in the fourth century AD the Emperor Constantine introduced a new calendar system and changed Christmas Day to December 25. Even today, Orthodox Christians, for example in Russia and Greece, celebrate their Christmas festival at Epiphany on January 6.

In Spain it's customary to set up a nativity scene at the beginning of December. There's a midnight mass on Christmas Eve, followed by a lavish feast and a cheerful party. Children only get presents on the morning of January 6, and adults don't usually exchange presents. Just like the kings brought gifts to the baby Jesus, the children in Spain are given presents on that day.

'Sinterklaas' brings the presents in Holland on December 6. These tend to be brightly wrapped and hidden somewhere in the house. Sometimes a huge parcel may contain a small present accompanied by a funny verse. The actual days of Christmas are usually spent quietly with family.

In Sweden the most significant day of this season is St Lucia day on December 13. Usually

the oldest girl in the family dresses up as St Lucy. Wearing a long white dress and a green wreath with burning candles on her head, she wakes up the rest of the family and brings them breakfast in bed. By doing so she appears as the bringer of light in darkness (see the legend of St Lucy on page 68).

In Italy, too, people commemorate St Lucy. Children either receive presents on December 13, or on the morning of December 25, or on January 6 – the traditions differ according to the various regions. 'Betana' is the name of the witch who comes down the chimney riding on her broom and fills the children's stockings with sweets. But the main focus of the festival is the nativity scene, which is either baked from dough, carved from wood or fashioned in some other artistic way. Elaborate landscapes are often created around the crib.

Many German customs are described in this book. It's quite common in Germany to take part in a family service as it gets dark on Christmas Eve. Children have been waiting for the 'Christ-kind', the Christ child, all through Advent and all day on Christmas Eve, until finally in the evening they find the tree lit, the child in the manger and presents under the tree. From then onwards, the Christmas biscuits, Lebkuchen and Stollen that were baked during Advent are shared with family and friends throughout the Holy Nights until Epiphany on January 6. During these candlelit gatherings, carols are sung and stories are read.

In France, fir trees are only available in the north. The further south one travels, the less

coniferous woods there are, and since firs would be very expensive people often decide not to have one. Going to the midnight service on Christmas Eve is central, though, followed by a festive supper lasting for hours, after which presents are exchanged.

In Australia people love to celebrate Christmas too. For many people the festivities begin with a church service at midnight on Christmas Eve. As in Britain and in the USA, presents are opened on the morning of December 25. Santa Claus brings them during the night, riding on a sledge drawn by white kangaroos. Christmas is in the middle of the Australian summer and it tends to be very hot, which is why many people go to the beach for a picnic on Christmas Day. But since many Australians originally came from Europe and took their customs with them, everyone still loves singing the traditional carols about the snow and the freezing cold night. The shops provide artificial snow, plastic Christmas trees and snowmen.

Even though Christians are a small percentage of India's people, Christmas is a holiday there. There are gatherings with neighbours and friends, and everyone brings food to share, which turns into a feast. New clothes are commonly given at Christmas time and people are happy and proud to wear their new garments.

Bolivia is in South America. At the beginning of December corn or rice is sown so that their green shoots appear by Christmas. This is seen as a sure sign that through the birth of Jesus Christ the earth has been renewed. In Bolivia, too,

people set up a nativity scene and the figures and the landscape around the crib look just like the Bolivians and their hilly country. Shortly before midnight everyone heads to church. After the service people continue to celebrate with their relatives. They light candles, serve honey biscuits, sing carols and exchange small presents.

In the Republic of Benin, a small country in western Africa, people also set up a nativity scene, but mainly in churches. The main focus at Christmas is the church service and the meal that follows, which everyone looks forward to for days. After the service people meet in front of the church and share their food – mainly meat since this is only eaten on special days, sometimes only once a year at Christmas. Relatives and friends also exchange small gifts of food.

December 19

THE BIRDS' CAROL

From out of a wood did a cuckoo fly,
Cuckoo.

He came to a manger with joyful cry,
Cuckoo.

He hopped, he curtsied, round he flew,
And loud his jubilation grew,
Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo.

A pigeon flew over to Galilee,
Vrercroo.

He strutted, and cooed, and was full of glee,
Vrercroo.

And showed with jewelled wings unfurled,
His joy that Christ was in the world,
Vrercroo, vrercroo, vrercroo.

A dove settled down upon Nazareth,
Tsucroo.

And tenderly chanted with all his breath,
Tsucroo.

'O you,' he cooed, 'so good and true,
My beauty do I give to you,
Tsucroo, Tsucroo, Tsucroo.'

Traditional Czech carol, translated by Percy Dearmer

Apricot almond chocolates

INGREDIENTS

200 g (7 oz) dried undyed apricots

One whole almond per apricot

50 g (1¾ oz) dark chocolate

7 g (¼ oz) butter

Melt the butter in a saucepan over a gentle heat, add the chocolate and melt together while stirring continuously.

Place an almond on to a flattened apricot and half-dip both together into the molten chocolate. Cool on a wire rack.



Riddle

Can you guess what's being described in this riddle? You'll find the answer on page 142.

Sits on the table
And lights up the wall,
Brings scents of Christmas,
Delights children and all.

Obstacle race game

December may be cold and wet and children might be lacking exercise. So occasionally the living room can be transformed into a 'gym'. Children will be happy to join in setting up an obstacle course using chairs, armchairs, benches, stools, shopping baskets, cushions, and so on. An adult should check the course for safety. The course has to be completed either within a certain time limit or, for example, with a book on the head or a small basket with nuts in one hand. It's a good idea to practise a few times beforehand. Perhaps there will be a small prize for everyone.



December 20

CHRISTMAS

The very heart of heaven
now throbs within the earth,
a secret life is stirring
since heaven's earthly birth.

A secret sound is swelling
that never has been heard,
within the world is working
a clear and sacred word.

The message that it carries
is wrought by God's own art,
the poem of all poems
now moves the human heart.

Rex Raab

Making a magic wool star

MATERIALS

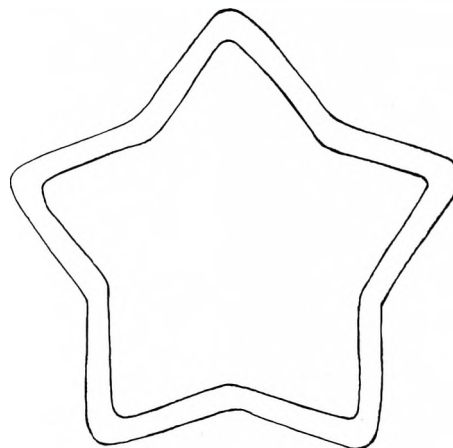
Cardboard
Golden gift cord
Small bell
White unspun sheep's wool
Pencil and scissors

Draw a star on to the cardboard following the pattern given here, enlarged to the desired size. Cut it out.

Wind thin strands of sheep's wool around the star, making sure the strands remain flat during the winding process. Take extra care with the corners of the star. Keep winding thin layers of wool on top of each other until the outline of the star shape is approximately 1.5–2 cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ –1 in) wide.

Now wind the golden gift cord around the wool and tie the ends together.

Finally, hang the bell in the middle of the star with some more golden cord. Use the same cord to create a loop for hanging up the star.



Story of the beautiful silk scarf

There were only four days left until Christmas. Mum was really busy. I could tell from the look on her face that it was better not to ask any unnecessary questions or leave anything lying around; this would tip her over the edge, and only result in extra cleaning jobs. So I made sure to clear away used tissues, empty glasses, sweetie wrappers and dirty socks.

Mum had been organising everything: decorations, presents, shopping, cleaning, food and whatever else needed doing. When Dad came home in the evening he would listen to what Mum told him, give her a kiss and say, 'Darling, it's wonderful you are doing all of this!' And Mum would forget all about asking him to come home earlier, to do some shopping or to clean the bathroom... no, she just smiled contentedly.

This year Auntie Erica's present created a bit of a headache. Mum still hadn't found the right gift. Auntie Erica was Granny's sister. She lived all by herself and had no family, except for us. That's why every year on Boxing Day we were invited to her house for coffee. I drew a picture for Auntie Erica, with a Christmas tree, a crib and the baby Jesus. Mum stroked my hair and said, 'This is perfect. Auntie Erica will love it.'

Mum was so terribly busy that she just couldn't think of a good present, and Dad didn't come up

with a useful idea either. So they decided to look in our secret present box, which was kept on the top shelf in the larder. Mum kept little things in there that might make good presents when one was needed. There were a few candles of various shapes and sizes, some interesting books, a towel with a matching facecloth, a corkscrew in a special box – and a yellow tartan silk scarf. Mum was delighted and held it up. 'Look, wouldn't that make an ideal present for Auntie Erica? The pattern suits a lady her age, and it's real silk!' Dad was quick to agree. The scarf was beautifully wrapped, I was allowed to tie a ribbon around it and we kept it safe in a drawer.

On Boxing Day we set off for Auntie Erica's. She had laid the table with festive decorations, lit lots of candles and made coffee and tea. There were Stollen, honey cake and Christmas biscuits on the table. But before we sat down, we gave Auntie Erica our presents. I had rolled up my drawing and tied a golden ribbon around it. First of all she unrolled it and had a good look at what I had drawn for her. 'It's beautiful – I'll put it on the sideboard so I can look at it every day,' she said.

Then she unwrapped Mum and Dad's present. Auntie Erica took the silk scarf in her hands,

passed it a few times through her hands and smiled thoughtfully. 'Children, children,' she said over and over, even though Mum and Dad were quite grown up. 'You make me very happy. Yellow is my favourite colour, you know.' Mum was visibly relieved and pleased that we'd made a good choice.

Auntie Erica gave Mum and Dad a gift token, so they could choose something for themselves, and I got a book of really good stories. It turned out to be a perfect afternoon and Auntie Erica's biscuits are some of the best I've ever eaten.

You might think the story finished here but, actually, it continued in the summertime, on Auntie Erica's birthday. She had invited a lot of people and naturally Granny and us as her family. Everyone was dressed up because it was a special birthday and there was food and drink and people were laughing and having a lovely time. After all the guests had gone home, only Mum, Dad, Granny and me were left, and Auntie Erica looked very beautiful in her new dark blue dress. She also wore the scarf we had given her for Christmas. She had draped it twice around her neck and clasped it together with a golden brooch.

'You are looking lovely and the scarf suits you very much,' Dad complimented Auntie Erica.

'Oh, thank you. Ah, yes, the scarf,' she added. 'Didn't I once give you one exactly the same?' she said, turning to Granny. 'And so far I've never seen it on you.'

Granny looked a bit embarrassed and glanced over at Mum anxiously. 'Well, you know, tartan has never been my favourite and so it just gathered dust by cupboard and...'

'Why didn't you tell me?' Mum interrupted her, remembering that the yellow tartan silk scarf had actually been given to her by Granny.

Now Dad started laughing and could hardly stop himself, and as everyone realised what had happened we all laughed and laughed...

When Auntie Erica was able to speak again she explained, 'For weeks on end I would go past the shop round the corner from my house to have a look at this beautiful scarf. I really liked it but it was just a little too expensive. Then your birthday drew closer, dear Lisbeth' – that's Granny – 'and I decided to buy this scarf for you. I wanted to give you something special. When I had it in my hands I found it was even more beautiful than I thought. It was difficult to give it away, and now I am very happy to wear it. I'm not the slightest bit annoyed with any of you!'





Wolf's tooth cakes

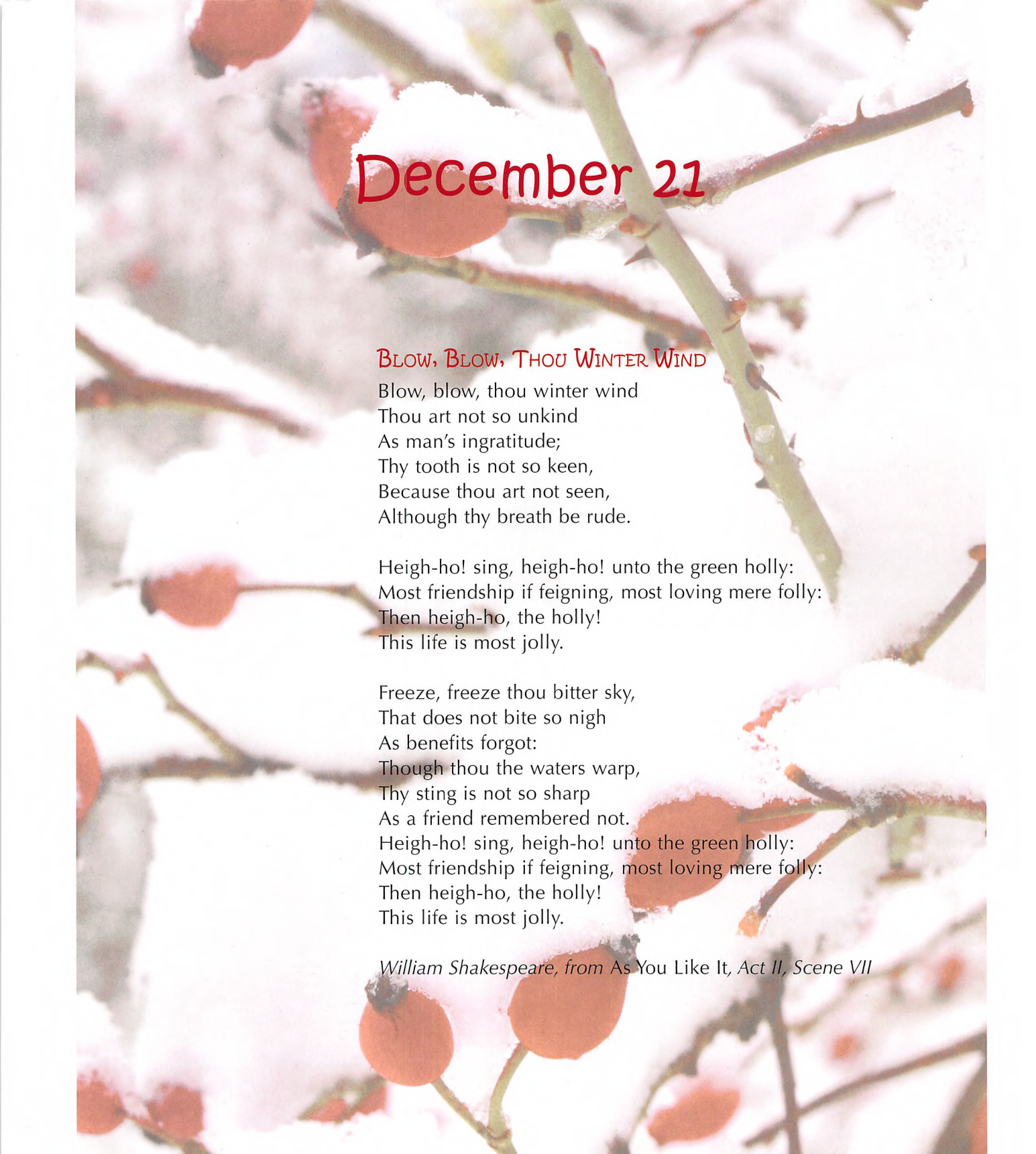
INGREDIENTS

- 3 eggs
- 100–150 g (3½–5¼ oz) sugar
- 3 tbsp hot water
- 150 g (5¼ oz) plain white flour
- 50 g (1¾ oz) desiccated coconut
- 1 tsp baking powder

Beat the eggs together with the sugar and the hot water until fluffy.

Mix the flour with the baking powder, sift and carefully fold into the egg mixture. Finally, add the desiccated coconut.

Using a teaspoon, scoop three small portions into the groove of a 'wolf's teeth tray' (this is a special corrugated tray, see illustration). Make sure the tray is well greased and dusted with flour. Bake at 175°C (350°F) until lightly browned.



December 21

BLOW, BLOW, THOU WINTER WIND

Blow, blow, thou winter wind
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude;
Thy tooth is not so keen,
Because thou art not seen,
Although thy breath be rude.

Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly:
Most friendship if feigning, most loving mere folly:
Then heigh-ho, the holly!
This life is most jolly.

Freeze, freeze thou bitter sky,
That does not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot:
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As a friend remembered not.
Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly:
Most friendship if feigning, most loving mere folly:
Then heigh-ho, the holly!
This life is most jolly.

William Shakespeare, from As You Like It, Act II, Scene VII



Homemade wrapping paper

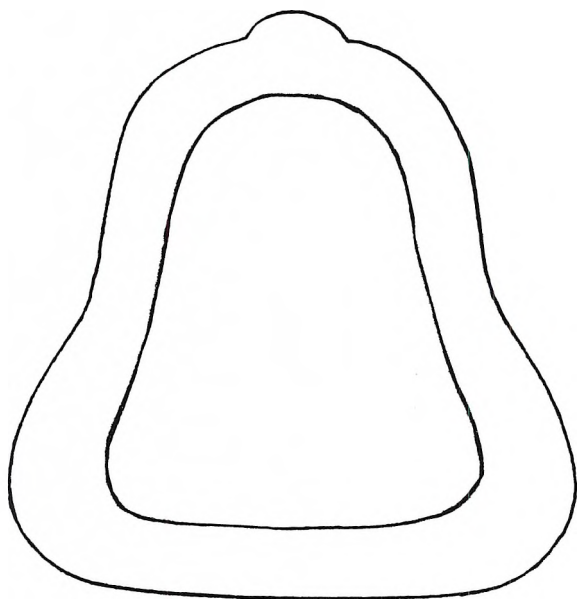
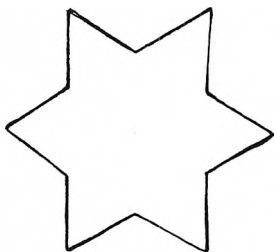
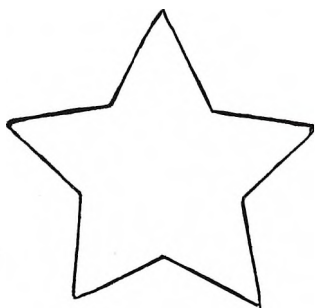
MATERIALS

Thin drawing paper or unprinted newspaper
Cardboard templates
Scissors
Wax crayons or coloured pencils

Cut out cardboard templates using the patterns given here, enlarging them if you wish to. Place each template one by one underneath the paper and carefully rub over them with a wax crayon or a coloured pencil. On a single sheet of paper you can use one motif, with one or more colours, or various motifs and colours, depending on your taste.

Since adhesive tape doesn't stick easily to wax, always tie a ribbon around presents as well.





Homemade gift tags

MATERIALS

Coloured cardboard

Scissors

Pencil

Golden gift cord and darning needle

Use the same templates as you cut out for decorating the wrapping paper (see previous page). Place them on to the coloured card, trace the outlines with a pencil and cut out.

Make a small hole in each tag using the needle. Pull a short length of golden gift cord through each cardboard shape and tie a knot.

Write the name of the person who the present is for on the gift tag.





Dried fruit slice

INGREDIENTS

200 g (7 oz) dried mixed fruit (such as apples, prunes, figs, pears)

50 g (1¾ oz) chopped hazelnuts

1 tbsp red grape juice (or other red juice)

1 tbsp lemon juice

2 thin wafers 12 x 20 cm (5 x 8 in)

Chop the mixed fruit with a knife or pass through a mincer.

Mix together the fruit, chopped hazelnuts, grape and lemon juice, and spread on to a wafer.

Put the second wafer on top and press down with a wooden board. Put a weight on it, such as a bottle, and leave to dry until the following day.

Cut into squares or diamond shapes.

TIP

Fruit slices make a popular and nutritious snack all year round.



A few thoughts about presents

Giving presents is part the spirit of Christmas. God gave his son and his love to us. In memory of the birth of Jesus we give presents to each other at Christmas time. Does this really still correspond to life as it is today? Are there not also a whole string of social obligations we feel we have to adhere to? Are we not letting ourselves be ruled by the consumerist world we live in?

Never before have there been so many shops, so many shopping opportunities as today. The shelves are full of useful and beautiful things – but also things that are quite useless and no one really needs. Most people in developed countries

have enough money to buy what they really need and choose for themselves. The joy experienced in receiving a present is often replaced by disappointment once it has been unwrapped. Is this because we already have so much?

So, what essentially makes a good present? Of course the intention is to make the other person happy. A present should not be so big and valuable that the receiver feels indebted to the giver, yet it ought to be generous. We should give part of ourselves and show our love and affection, without any self-interest. There is an old German saying: 'small presents keep a friendship alive.'

Good presents seem to need space and time: time to allow yourself to think about the other person; time to choose something suitable; time to wrap it up beautifully; time for each other; and, best of all, time spent together. Eugen Roth says, 'You do not possess time, you take time.' In times when we can afford so many things, time itself – which we all have the same amount of – has become one of the most precious gifts. That's probably one of the reasons why homemade presents are so often appreciated.

In order to avoid disappointment and false hopes, it may make sense to talk to family and friends about the kinds of presents you intend to give. It's important, though, to leave enough space for imagination, spontaneity, individuality and surprises.

Gift box

MATERIALS

Coloured thin card or thick paper

Glue

Scissors

Pencil

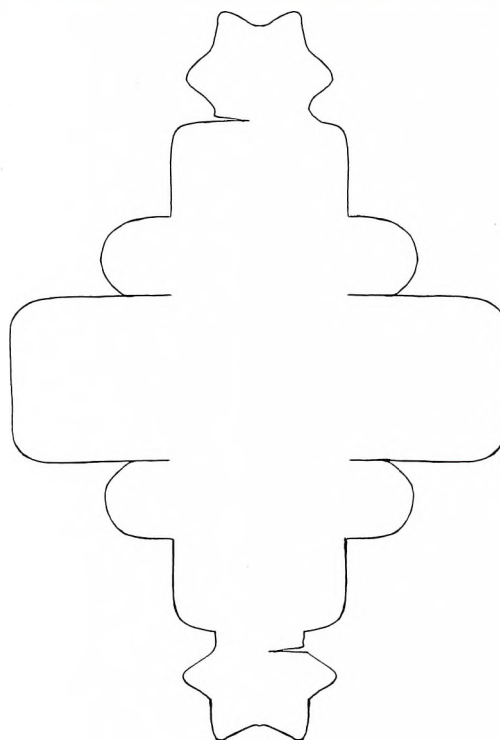
Cardboard for making templates

Make a template following the pattern shown here. Enlarge the template up to A4 (letter) size, depending on the size of box required. The larger the box, the stronger the card needs to be.

Copy it on to the coloured card, cut it out and fold at the lines. At the base of each star, cut only half the line as indicated.

Put glue on to the four flaps and press them to the four sides.

To close the box, interlock the two cut edges of the stars.



December 22

THE HOLLY AND THE IVY

The holly and the ivy
When they are both full grown.
Of all the trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown.

*Oh, the rising of the sun,
And the running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.*

The holly bears a blossom
As white as lily flower;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To be our sweet Saviour.
Oh, the rising ...

The holly bears a berry
As red as any blood;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To do poor sinners good.
Oh, the rising ...

The holly bears a prickly
As sharp as any thorn;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
On Christmas day in the morn.
Oh, the rising ...

The holly bears a bark
As bitter as any gall;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
For to redeem us all.
Oh the rising ...

Traditional



Felt poinsettia flowers

MATERIALS

Red felt

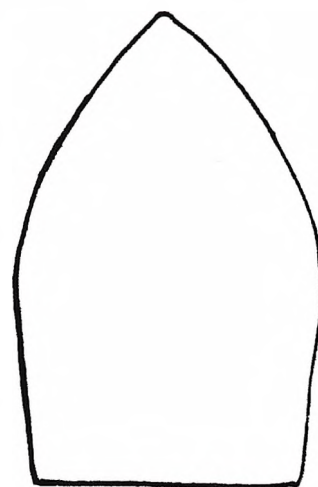
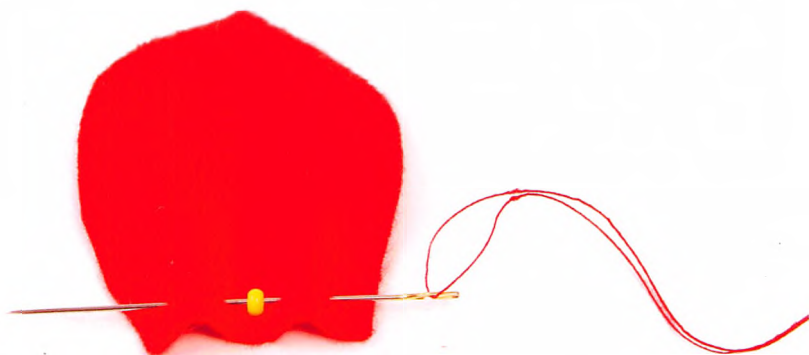
Yellow wooden beads with a 2 mm (1/8 in)
diameter

Sewing kit

Trace the outline of the petal-shaped pattern shown here on to cardboard. Cut it out to use as a template. Now copy the petal shape five times on to the red felt and cut these out as well.

Thread a sewing needle with red thread, double it and tie a knot at the end. Secure the thread with saddle-stitch at the bottom corner of a petal. Now insert the needle in a running-stitch pattern and thread a bead in the middle as shown in the photograph. Gather together and continue with the next petal.

Five of these petals make up a flower. When you reach the end, secure the thread firmly before cutting.





Lebkuchen slices

INGREDIENTS

250 g (8¾ in) syrup
100 g (3½ in) brown sugar
2 tbsp water
75 g (2⅔ oz) brown sugar crystals
300 g (10½ oz) spelt flour
½ tsp Lebkuchen spice (see page 33)
½ tsp baking powder
50 g (1¾ oz) chopped hazelnuts
25 g (1 oz) finely chopped candied lemon peel
Milk to glaze

Put the syrup, brown sugar and water into a pan and bring to the boil. Stir until all the sugar has dissolved. Let the mixture cool.

Put the crystallised sugar into a freezer bag and break up with a meat tenderiser or rolling pin, or crush in a pestle and mortar.

In a bowl, mix the flour, spice, baking powder, nuts, crystallised sugar and candied lemon peel. Add the cooled sugar syrup and lightly knead into a soft dough. Wrap in tin foil and leave for three hours.

On a floured surface, roll out the dough until it is approximately ½ cm (¼ in) thick. Cut out rectangular slices with a knife, place these on a baking tray lined with baking parchment and brush with milk.

Bake in a preheated oven at 180°C (350°F) for approximately 10 minutes.

Story of the little fir tree

In the woods behind the meadow, just after the first clearing, there was a tiny little fir tree. It felt lonely among all the huge beeches and oak trees – despite them being trees too, they were all quite different.

Sometimes the little fir tree heard the bigger trees rustle their leaves and whisper about him: ‘Where did he come from? There are no other fir trees anywhere near here...’ Then the little fir tree would become quite sad, and the biggest wish in his little fir-tree heart was to grow and grow until he would be as big as his neighbours – and maybe even become a Christmas tree one day. But, he sighed, what a long time that would take! At the moment, the hares and the fox had to be careful not to trample on him at night while roaming through the woods; he was that small.

A whole year went by and he hardly grew at all. The little fir tree still looked very weak. Even the deer felt sorry for him and decided not to eat his tender young shoots.

One day in winter a woodcutter walked through the wood. He marked some of the trees with red paint. Shortly after that the chainsaws of the forestry commission workers could be heard. The marked trees were being cut down. Some would be used for firewood, others were destined for the furniture factory to be made into wardrobes.

The little fir tree, after miraculously not being trodden down by the forestry workers, could now see the sky and the sun for the first time. He stretched himself towards them. He stretched himself and stretched himself and could not get enough of all that lovely light. Soon he was three feet high...

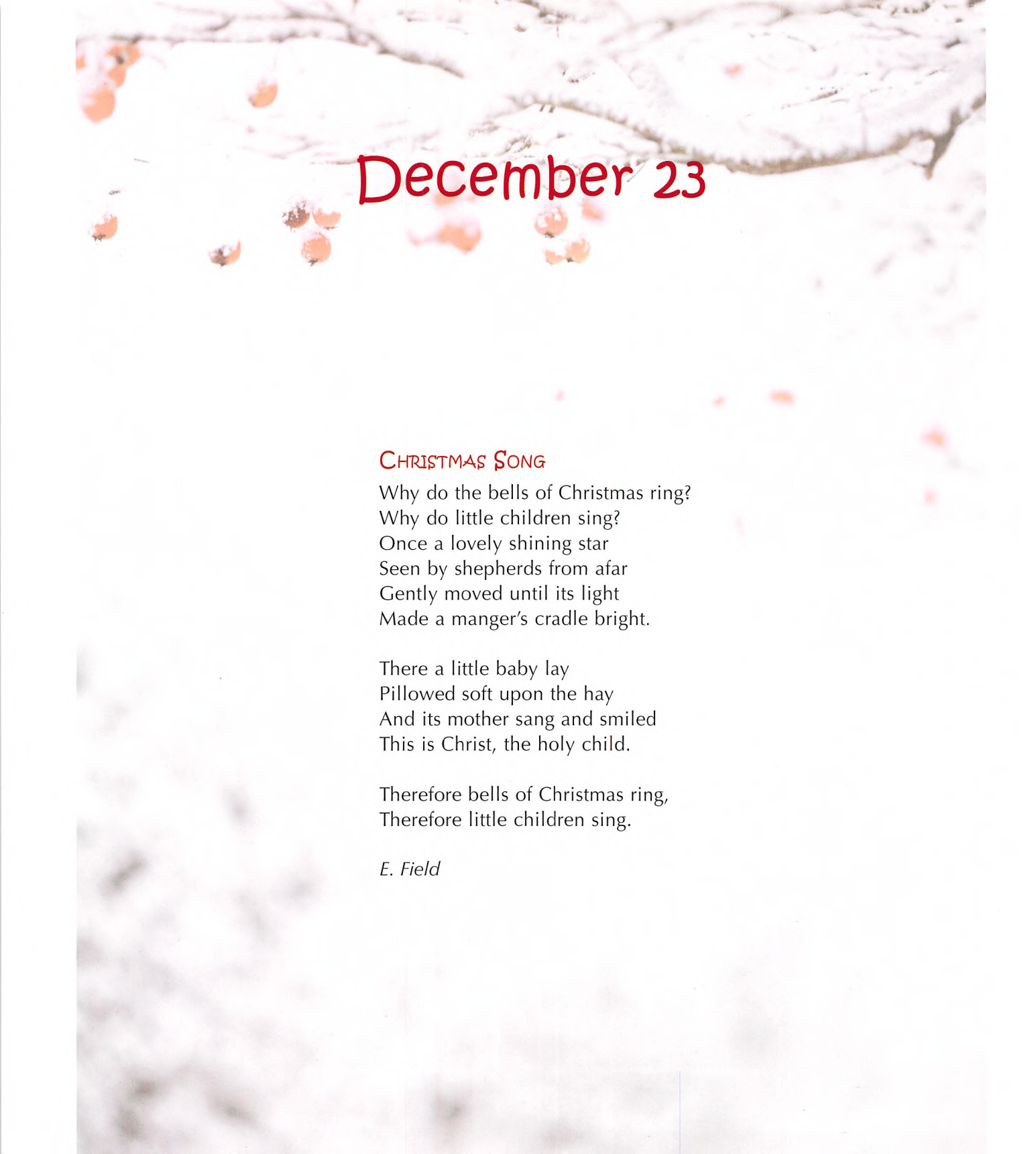
Many years passed and then, one year, Christmas was drawing near. There was much commotion and a whole load of fir trees were taken from

the nearby forest to be sold as Christmas trees in town. On the morning of Christmas Eve all the trees were sold and there was not one tree left to buy in the whole town. So the woodcutter had to go to the woods again to look for a Christmas tree for his family.

He set off and came to the place where once, between huge beeches and oaks, a little fir tree had stood. Now a beautiful tall fir tree was growing there. ‘This is just the right tree for my family,’ said the woodcutter.

The fir tree grew excited. ‘Will I really be allowed to become the woodcutter’s Christmas tree?’ he asked himself. He had never dared to dream such a thing.

The Christmas tree of the woodcutter’s family reached from the floor to the ceiling. It was very straight and evenly grown and the woodcutter’s children decorated it with colourful baubles, straw stars, wooden figures and apples. On Christmas Eve, beaming faces with bright eyes looked up at it. And the fir tree was very happy and content. He was the most beautiful Christmas tree the woodcutter’s family had ever had. They talked about their favourite tree for years to come.



December 23

CHRISTMAS SONG

Why do the bells of Christmas ring?
Why do little children sing?
Once a lovely shining star
Seen by shepherds from afar
Gently moved until its light
Made a manger's cradle bright.

There a little baby lay
Pillowed soft upon the hay
And its mother sang and smiled
This is Christ, the holy child.

Therefore bells of Christmas ring,
Therefore little children sing.

E. Field

Tissue-paper angel

MATERIALS

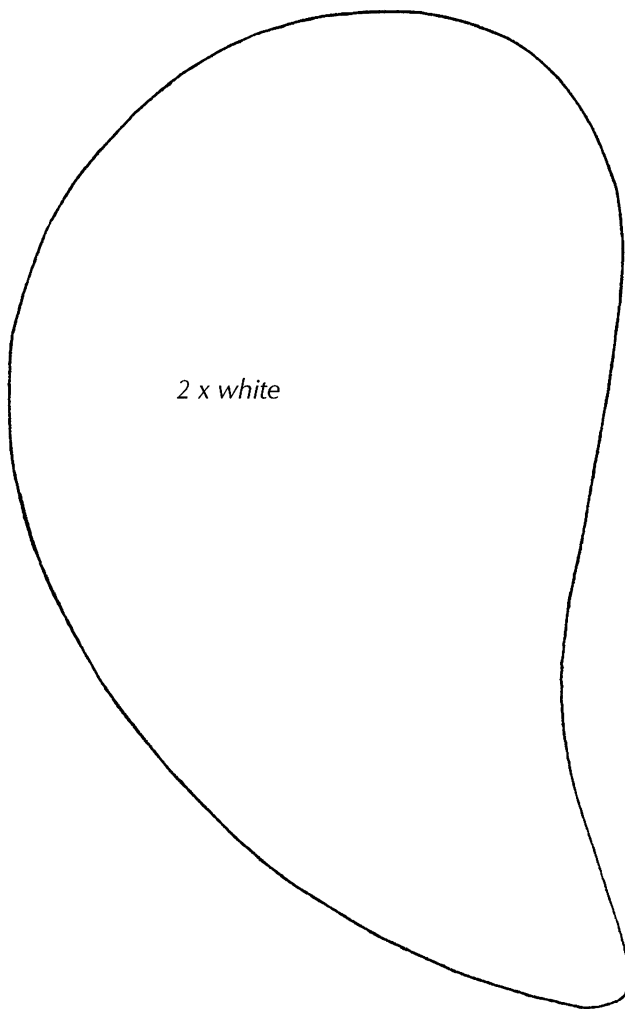
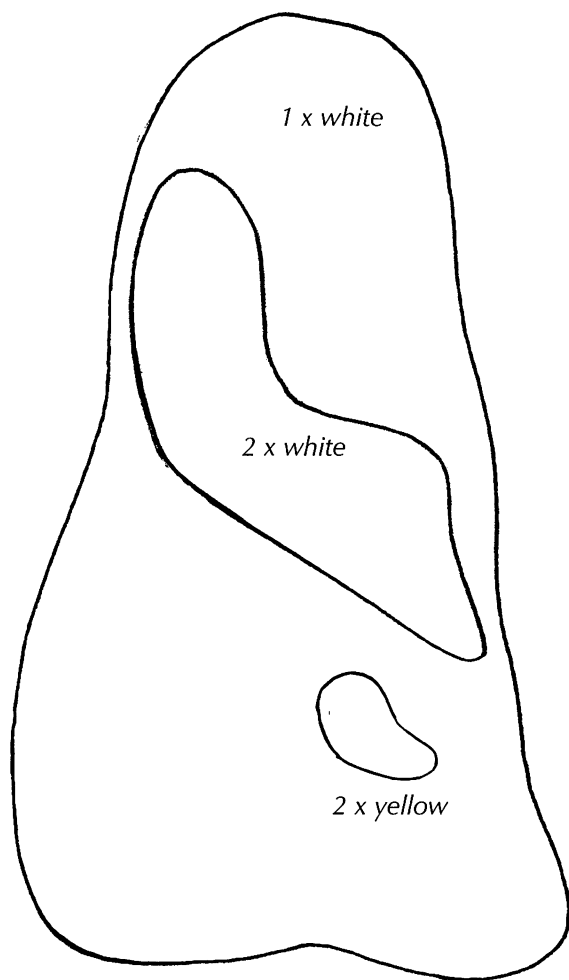
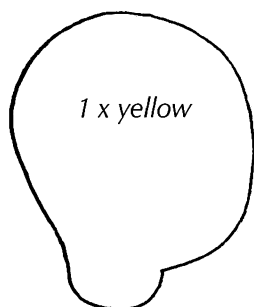
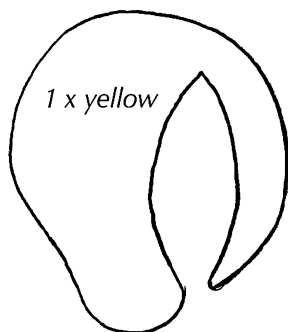
White tissue paper
Yellow tissue paper
Scissors
Glue stick
Pencil

Copy the various parts of the angel pattern shown overleaf on to the tissue paper. The parts for the head and hands need to be copied on to yellow tissue paper and all the other parts on to white tissue paper. Press the pencil down lightly so the line can only just be seen. You can photocopy the pattern from the book and enlarge it if you wish. If you intend to make a number of angels, it's a good idea to make cardboard templates that you can re-use.

After carefully cutting out all the parts, use a glue stick to assemble the angel, applying as little glue as possible. First of all, glue both parts of the head together. Then attach the head to the dress, followed by arms and hands. Now turn the angel around and glue both wings to the dress.

You can stick the finished angel to a window with transparent sticky tape.





Christmas almonds

INGREDIENTS

250 g (8¾ oz) almonds
100 g (3½ oz) milk chocolate
15 g (½ oz) butter
1 tsp cinnamon
½ tsp Lebkuchen spice (see page 33)
Icing sugar for dusting

Put the almonds on to a baking sheet and roast in the oven at 150°C (300°F) for 10 minutes.

Melt the butter in a pan over a gentle heat, add the chocolate and mix together, stirring continuously. Then add the spices and the warm almonds. Stir until the almonds are completely coated with chocolate.

Now place the almonds individually on a tray lined with greaseproof paper to cool. Once the chocolate is set, carefully lift them off the paper, put into a shallow dish, then dust with icing sugar and stir. Christmas almonds need to be kept cool.

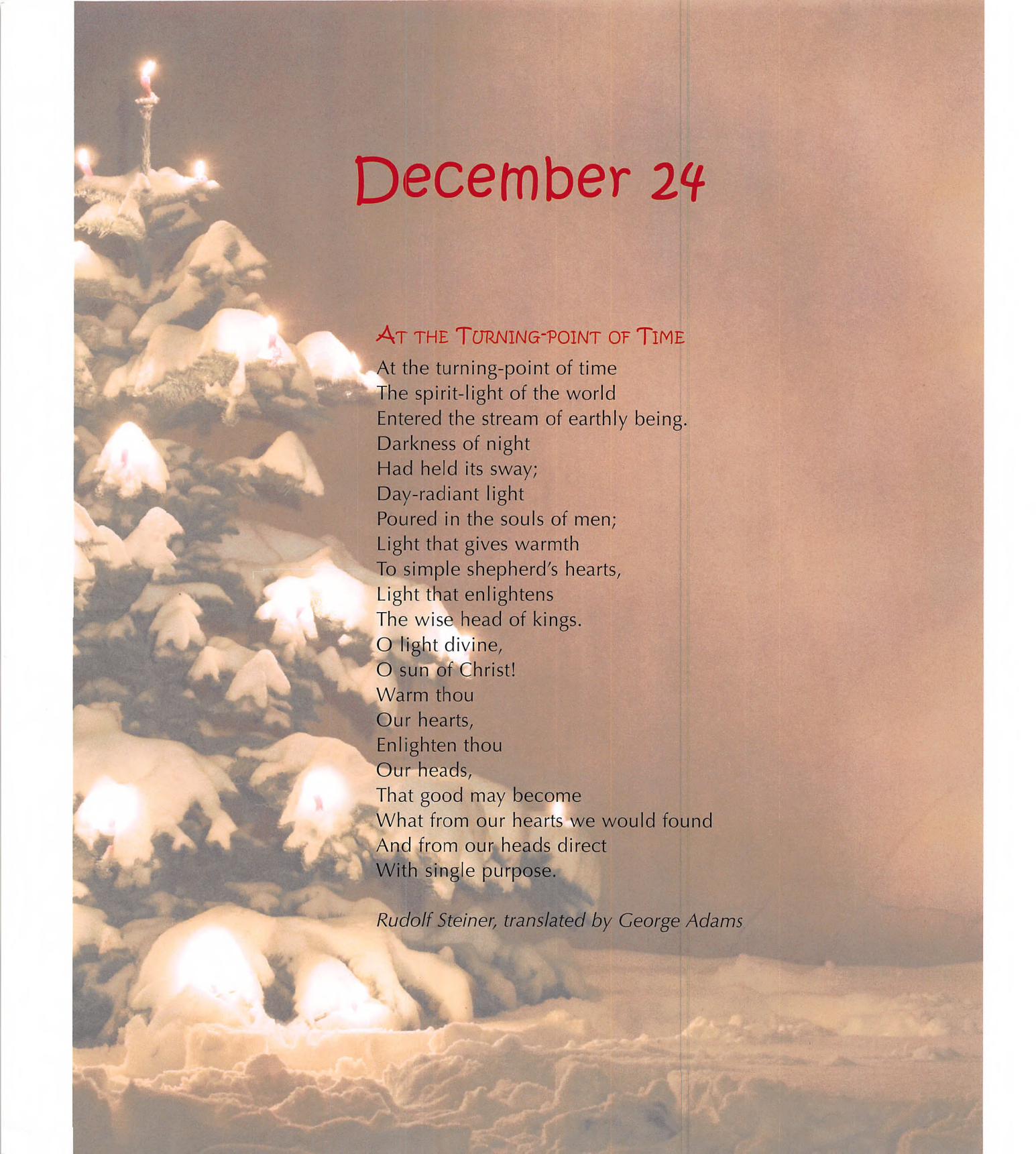
Riddles

Can you guess what's being described in these riddles? You'll find the answers on page 142.

Glittering points
That downward thrust,
Sparkling spears
That never rust.

Lighter than what
I am made of,
More of me is hidden
Than is seen.





December 24

AT THE TURNING-POINT OF TIME

At the turning-point of time
The spirit-light of the world
Entered the stream of earthly being.
Darkness of night
Had held its sway;
Day-radiant light
Poured in the souls of men;
Light that gives warmth
To simple shepherd's hearts,
Light that enlightens
The wise head of kings.
O light divine,
O sun of Christ!
Warm thou
Our hearts,
Enlighten thou
Our heads,
That good may become
What from our hearts we would found
And from our heads direct
With single purpose.

Rudolf Steiner, translated by George Adams



Nativity figures: magic wool baby Jesus

MATERIALS

White and yellow unspun wool (magic wool)
Sewing kit

Take a thin white strand of wool, 10–15 cm (4–6 in) long, and tie it with thread in the middle. Fold in half and tie it off again with thread to create a small head. Fold the ends towards the inside.

Arrange a small amount of yellow wool around the head for hair and secure with tiny stitches.



From another 10–15 cm (4–6 in) piece of white fleece, make a swaddling cloth to wrap the baby's head and body in. The wool should hold itself in place and shouldn't require extra sewing.



Vegetarian festive menu

This simple festive menu is easy to prepare with children, and can be made a day in advance. The leek soup and carrots can be re-heated on the day. The semolina dessert should be cooked and cooled. You can also mix the salad dressing the day before and keep it in the fridge. On Christmas Eve you will just have to wash the lettuce, boil the potatoes and prepare the cheese schnitzels.

Leek soup

INGREDIENTS

2–3 leeks
1 litre (1 quart) water
2 tbsp flour
125 ml (½ cup) single (light) cream or milk
Salt and bouillon to taste

Clean the leeks, chop into thin rings, wash and cook in 1 litre (1 quart) of salty water until tender.

Mix a little cold water with 2 tbsp flour, add to the leeks and bring to the boil.

Add the cream or milk and season to taste with salt and bouillon. Serve hot.

TIP

You can also blend the soup and serve it as cream of leek soup, garnished with a dollop of crème fraîche.

Mixed green salad

All leafy kinds of lettuce available in winter are suitable – lambs lettuce, endive, chicory, and so on.

INGREDIENTS FOR THE DRESSING

- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 tsp creamy horseradish
- ½ tsp strong mustard
- 3 tbsp plain yoghurt
- 3 tbsp single (light) cream
- 1 tbsp milk
- 2 tbsp raspberry vinegar
- ½ tsp garlic granules or grated garlic (optional)

Wash the lettuce, chop and drain well.

Mix all the dressing ingredients together in a jug or a shaker and pour over the salad shortly before serving.

Mascarpone Carrots

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g (1 lb) carrots
- 125 ml (½ cup) water
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp sugar
- 2 tbsp mascarpone cheese
- 1 tsp dried parsley

Wash and peel the carrots and dice. Boil in the salted water.

When they are cooked, add the sugar and mascarpone. Serve sprinkled with dried parsley.



Cheese schnitzels

INGREDIENTS (PER PERSON)

100 g (3½ oz) medium gouda (Swiss) cheese,
cut into 1 cm (½ in) slices
Water, flour, breadcrumbs, egg
Butter or margarine for frying

Moisten the cheese slightly with cold water, then dip it into the flour before coating it with egg and breadcrumbs.

Fry the cheese schnitzels on a medium heat on both sides until crisp. They are ready when the cheese starts melting.

Serve with boiled potatoes, cooked in their skin and then peeled.



Semolina dessert with cherries

INGREDIENTS

½ litre (½ quart) milk
50 g (1¾ oz) semolina
1 pinch of salt
1 tbsp sugar
1 jar of preserved cherries

Bring the milk, together with the salt and sugar, to the boil. Stir in the semolina and continue to cook on a low heat, stirring continuously. Set aside to cool until completely cold. Cut out portions with a tablespoon and serve with the cherries.



The Christmas Gospel according to St Luke

In those days a proclamation went out from Caesar Augustus that a census of the people should be taken over the whole earth. It was the first time that such a census had taken place. It came at the time when Quirinius was governor of the province of Syria. And everyone set out to be enrolled, each to his ancestral town.

And so Joseph also set off from Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the town of David which is called Bethlehem; for he was of the house and lineage of David. He went to be enrolled together with Mary, his betrothed. And Mary was with child. When they came to their destination, the time was fulfilled for her to be delivered, and she gave birth to a son, her first-born, and she swaddled him in linen and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

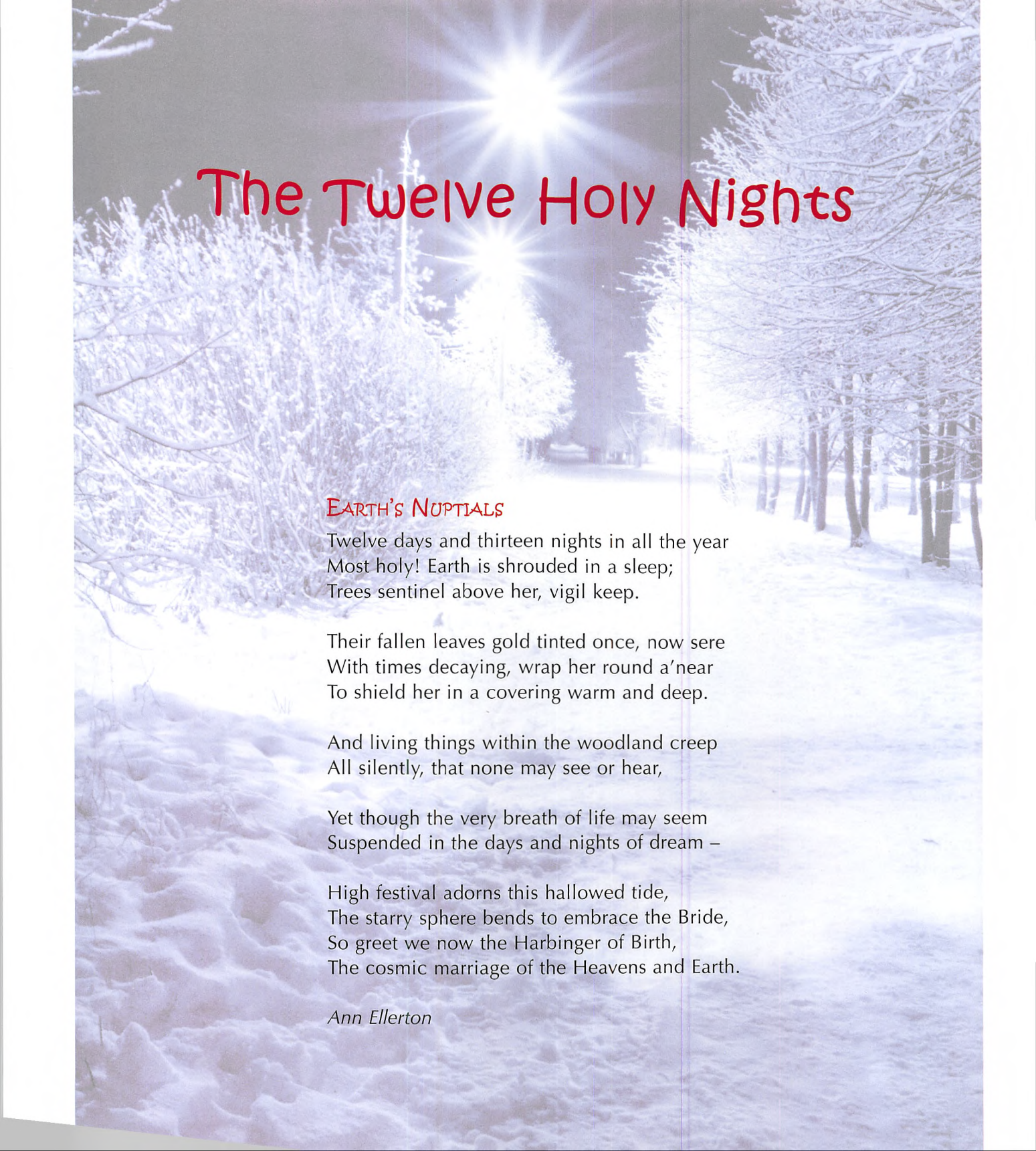
And in that neighbourhood there were shepherds in the field. They guarded and protected their flocks through the night. All at once, the angel of the Lord stood before them, and the light of the revelation of God shone about them. Great fear came upon them, but the angel said, 'Have no fear. See, I proclaim a great joy to you, which shall be for all mankind. Today the bringer of healing is born to you in the town of David: Christ, the Lord. And this is the sign by which you will know him: You will find a child swaddled in linen, lying in a manger.

And suddenly the fullness of the heavenly, angelic choirs was around the angel; their song of praise sounded forth to the Highest God:

God be revealed in the heights
and peace on earth
to men of good will.

And as the angels withdrew from them, entering again into the heavenly spheres, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go to Bethlehem to see the fulfilment of the word which the Lord has made known to us.' And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the babe which was lying in the manger. And when they saw it they made known what they had been told about the child. And all who heard it were astonished at the words of the shepherds. But Mary kept these words safe and contemplated them in her heart. And the shepherds returned home; heavenly light shone forth from the words with which they praised God, the Ground of the World, for all they had heard and seen. What they had been told had really been fulfilled.

Luke 2, 1–20, rendered by Jon Madsen

A photograph of a winter scene. The ground is covered in a thick layer of snow. On the left, there are snow-laden evergreen trees. On the right, there are bare, snow-covered deciduous trees. In the center background, a bright light source, possibly the sun or moon, is shining through the trees, creating a starburst effect. The overall color palette is cool, with blues, greys, and whites, accented by the red text.

The Twelve Holy Nights

EARTH'S NUPTIALS

Twelve days and thirteen nights in all the year
Most holy! Earth is shrouded in a sleep;
Trees sentinel above her, vigil keep.

Their fallen leaves gold tinted once, now sere
With times decaying, wrap her round a'neer
To shield her in a covering warm and deep.

And living things within the woodland creep
All silently, that none may see or hear,

Yet though the very breath of life may seem
Suspended in the days and nights of dream –

High festival adorns this hallowed tide,
The starry sphere bends to embrace the Bride,
So greet we now the Harbinger of Birth,
The cosmic marriage of the Heavens and Earth.

Ann Ellerton

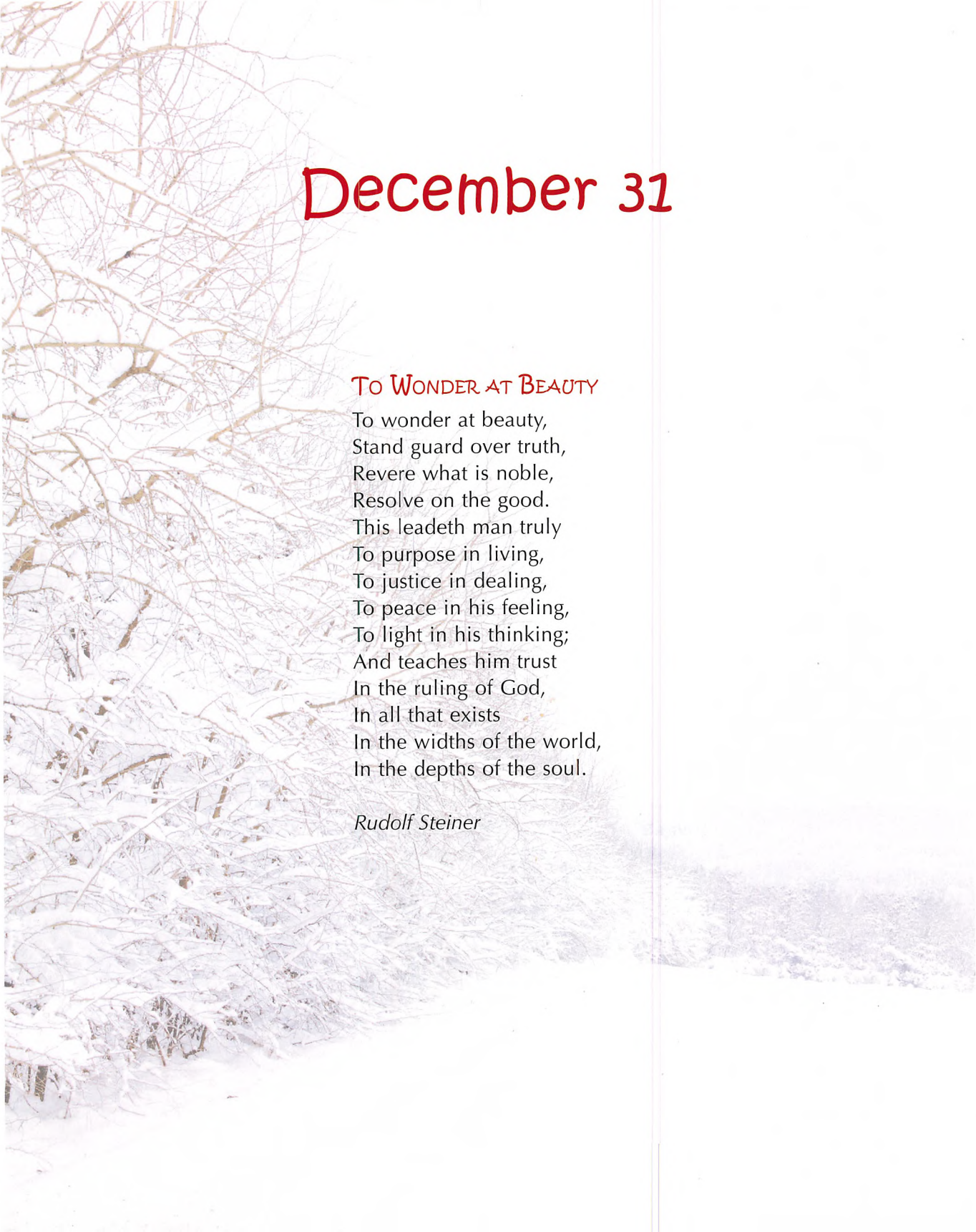
Tradition of the Twelve Holy Nights

During the time before Christmas, the weeks of Advent, we prepare for the actual festival, and in Germany the main Christmas celebration takes place on Christmas Eve. But the festival is also celebrated over the twelve days following days.

Ever since ancient times, the days between December 25 and January 6 have been important. The ancient Germanic people believed that the sun stood still during this time and that evil spirits and witches roamed the world. People had to be on their guard. The blacksmith was not allowed to light his fire; the spinning wheel had to rest; it was forbidden to do the washing or to hang it up to dry, and mending was also forbidden.

Since the old Germanic calendar with its 354 days was calculated according to the rhythm of the moon, twelve days were missing to correlate with the rhythm of the sun year. So at the change of year twelve days were inserted, which in many regions are still called the 'time between the years'. It was believed that these days should be spent in peace and quiet to protect oneself from harm. Only New Year's Eve with its fireworks reminds us of the old customs of driving off demons and other evil beings.

Some people call these twelve days and nights between Christmas and Epiphany the Twelve Holy Nights. The days between December 25 and January 6 may also be seen to mirror the coming twelve months of the year. We can each find our own way to approach this time in thoughtfulness and meditation, thinking of ways to make the most of these days. Maybe they can be reserved for long walks, afternoons playing games, social get-togethers with friends and family and evenings spent by the fireside or by candlelight making plans for the year to come. You may want to cook and eat special meals together, read and tell stories, share photographs, draw or paint – there's no limit to the imagination.



December 31

TO WONDER AT BEAUTY

To wonder at beauty,
Stand guard over truth,
Revere what is noble,
Resolve on the good.
This leadeth man truly
To purpose in living,
To justice in dealing,
To peace in his feeling,
To light in his thinking;
And teaches him trust
In the ruling of God,
In all that exists
In the widths of the world,
In the depths of the soul.

Rudolf Steiner

Legend of St Sylvester

Today is Sylvester. That's what we call New Year's Eve in Germany – the last day of the year. Grandmother and Grandfather are visiting and Aunt Rosalind and Uncle Christian are coming in the evening. I'm sure Uncle Christian will bring some fireworks. Mum said, if I manage to have a good afternoon nap, I'll be allowed to stay up until midnight. I'm really looking forward to tonight! Mum and Grandmother are preparing lovely things for supper in the kitchen. They don't have any time for me and I'm not even allowed to try anything. Grandfather is sitting in his armchair. His face is hidden behind the rustling newspaper he's reading. It's amazing how long adults can sit still without saying one word. But after a while I can't wait any longer because I want to ask him something.

'Grandfather...'

'Yes?'

'Why is the last day of the year called Sylvester?'

'Because it's St Sylvester's Day. That means, on this day a Pope named Sylvester died.'

'Was that a long time ago?'

'Yes, a very long time ago,' says Grandfather as he folds up his newspaper, lifts me on to his lap and starts to tell this story...

Sylvester lived in the fourth century. That was a time when Christians were persecuted and sometimes even killed for their beliefs. So Sylvester hid himself in a mountain hut near Rome. Being a Pope he spent his time praying and meditating. Occasionally some Christians from his congregation would come and visit him, to hide there for a while or to ask his advice.

During this time a new Emperor was crowned in Rome. Emperor Constantine wasn't a Christian,





but he didn't hate them as much as the previous Emperor. Now, Constantine was suffering from leprosy. His face, hands and feet, indeed his whole body was covered with ugly and bad smelling boils. The best doctors were called to help him but there was no cure for his illness. Nobody really knew what to do.

One night Constantine slept fitfully, then he had a dream in which two men appeared to him, but he didn't know who they were. They said, 'Only the grace of God our Lord will be able to heal you.'

The next day Constantine wondered about what these men had said and who on earth they were. His advisors didn't have an answer to his questions either. But one of them advised him to go and consult the wise hermit in the hills. On that same day messengers were sent out to look for Sylvester and to ask him to come to the Emperor.

Constantine greeted Sylvester like a grand duke. 'Can you help?' he asked him. 'Can you explain my dream?'

'These two men are the Apostles Peter and Paul, God's messengers here on earth. Whoever acknowledges this God will receive grace and healing,' Sylvester replied.

Constantine was very moved by this explanation. He asked Sylvester to teach him about Christian beliefs. The day that the Emperor was baptised by Sylvester he was cured from leprosy and became a devout Christian.

Sylvester was allowed to be Pope in Rome again. He died on December 31 335 AD, so on that day we commemorate him...

Grandfather has just finished telling his story, and now the doorbell is ringing. Aunt Rosalind and Uncle Christian have arrived and they did bring fireworks!

Sesame Crackers

INGREDIENTS

250 g (8¾ oz) spelt flour
1 tsp salt
50 g (1 ¾ oz) margarine
50 g (1 ¾ oz) sesame seeds
150–175 ml (¾ cup) milk

Sift the flour into a bowl and add the salt, margarine and sesame seeds. Warm up the milk in a pan and pour into the bowl. Now knead everything together into a smooth dough.

Roll out the dough thinly on a floured surface. Cut out round crackers 3–4 cm (1–1½ in) in diameter and place on a baking tray lined with baking parchment.

Bake in a preheated oven at 200°C (390°F) for 5–10 minutes.





Crispy sticks

INGREDIENTS

500 g (1 lb) plain flour
1 tsp salt
30 g (1 oz) fresh yeast
250 ml (1 cup) water
100 g (3½ oz) butter or margarine
2 tbsp olive oil

Put the flour in a bowl and make a well in the centre. Add the salt, olive oil and chopped butter around the edge. Dissolve the yeast in the lukewarm water, pour into the well and knead to a firm dough. Cover and let it rise for 30 minutes.

Knead a second time, shape into a long roll and cut into small pieces. Roll these into 20 cm (8 in) long sticks, no thicker than your little finger. Place on an oiled baking tray and let them rise for 15 minutes.

Brush the sticks with water before baking. Bake in a preheated oven at 220°C (430°F) for 10 minutes.

TIP

Crackers and crispy sticks served with a cream cheese or hummus dip, cheese cubes and freshly chopped vegetables make a delicious snack.



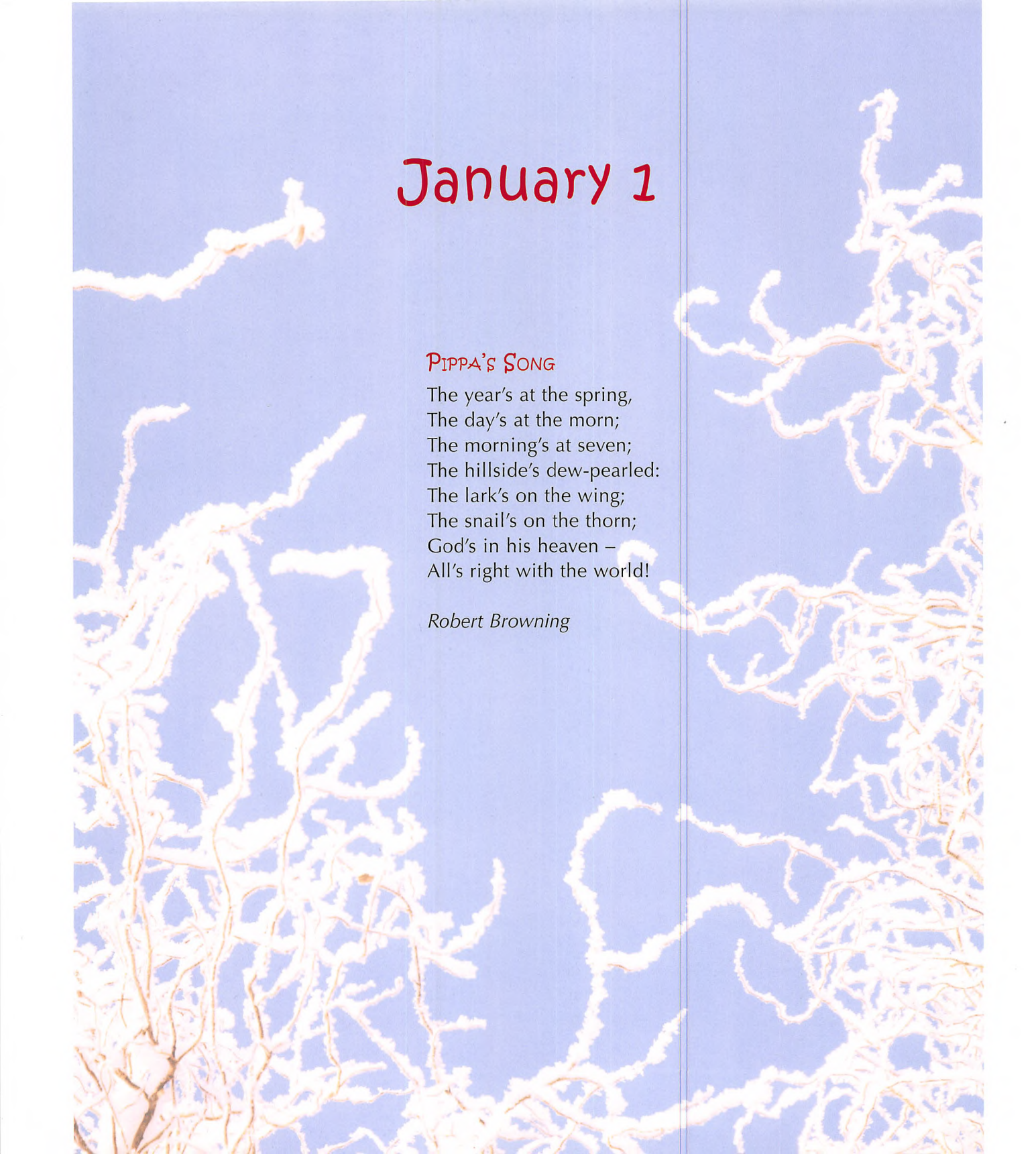
Apple-peel game

Give each player a shiny apple and a sharp knife. Now the task is to peel the apple so carefully that the peel comes off in one piece.

Let the peel drop on to a piece of paper, without touching it. Similar to reading tea leaves, each player can look at the shape that's been created and try to guess what it could mean. After

a while you can look at each other's shapes and exchange views.

It's often surprising what you can see in the various shapes and how these can be put into the context of someone's life. But be careful not to read too much into it – it's only a game after all! And don't forget to eat the peeled apples.



January 1

PIPPA'S SONG

The year's at the spring,
The day's at the morn;
The morning's at seven;
The hillside's dew-pearled:
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in his heaven –
All's right with the world!

Robert Browning

Good-luck pastries

INGREDIENTS

500 g (1 lb) plain white flour
1 pinch salt
80 g (3 oz) butter or margarine
1 tbsp honey
40 g (1 ½ oz) fresh yeast
250 ml (1 cup) milk or water

For the glaze: 1 egg yolk or single (light) cream

For eyes: a few raisins or currants

Put the flour in a bowl and make a well in the centre. Add the salt, honey and the chopped butter/margarine around the edge. Dissolve the yeast in the lukewarm milk, pour into the well and knead everything together to make a dough. Cover and let it rise in a warm place for 30 minutes.

Knead the dough again and roll out on a floured surface to finger thickness. To make a little pig, cut out two round shapes 7 and 3 cm (3 and 1¼ in) in diameter as heads and snouts. Use a knife to lift them off the surface. Place the

larger head shapes on a baking tray lined with baking parchment. With a knitting needle prick two holes into each snout, then stick them to the heads. From the remainder of the dough, cut ears with a knife or model them with your fingers. Dip two currants into egg white and make eyes by pressing them into the dough.

Before baking, glaze the good-luck pigs with egg yolk or cream. Bake at 170°C (340°F) for 15–20 minutes.

To make pretzels, divide the dough into ten equal pieces. Roll each piece into a 40 cm (16 in) roll and shape the pretzels. Glaze with egg yolk or cream and bake at 170°C (340°F) for 15–20 minutes.

TIP

You can make both pigs and pretzels from the same dough. They make good presents for neighbours and friends – or enjoy them yourselves on New Year's Day.





Making candles from leftover beeswax

MATERIALS

Beeswax candle stumps (other kinds of wax leftovers should be sorted according to colour)

Containers to pour the wax into (such as small clay bowls)

Candle wick

Strainer or small sieve

An empty coffee tin or similar tin

Elastic bands

Wooden sticks (such as skewers)

Cooking pot

Oven cloth

Warm up water in a cooking pot.

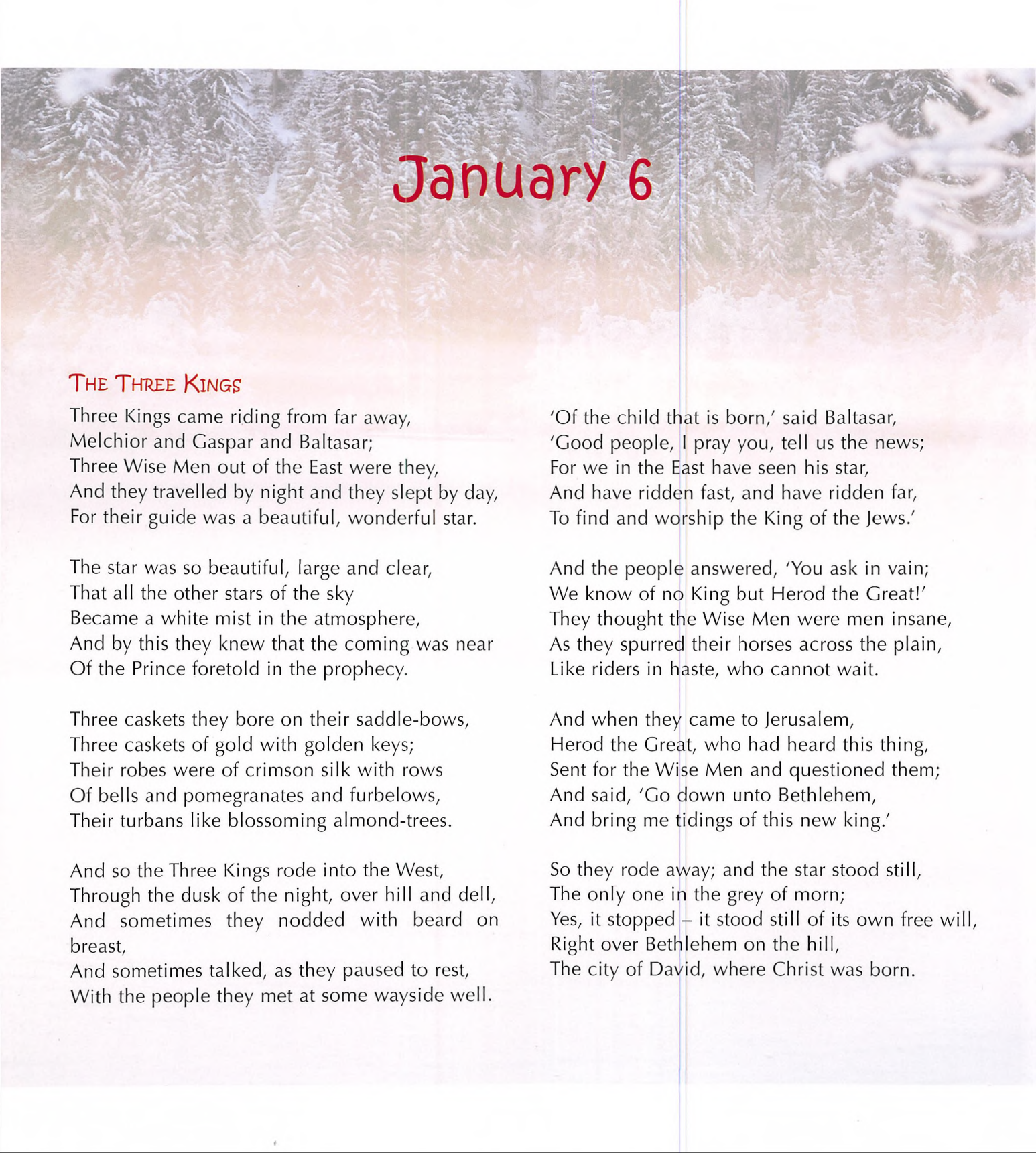
Cut the black wick from the old candle stumps and put all the wax remnants into the coffee tin. Place the tin into the hot water to melt the wax.

Dip the new wick into the molten wax. While cooling the wick, make sure it is straight. Now cut off the desired length from the wick and pinch it between two wooden sticks held together by elastic bands at the ends.

Lay the sticks across the top of the container, so the wick is in the centre. Now pour the molten wax through a sieve into the container and let it cool down.

Once cooled you can remove the sticks to leave your recycled candle.





January 6

THE THREE KINGS

Three Kings came riding from far away,
Melchior and Gaspar and Baltasar;
Three Wise Men out of the East were they,
And they travelled by night and they slept by day,
For their guide was a beautiful, wonderful star.

The star was so beautiful, large and clear,
That all the other stars of the sky
Became a white mist in the atmosphere,
And by this they knew that the coming was near
Of the Prince foretold in the prophecy.

Three caskets they bore on their saddle-bows,
Three caskets of gold with golden keys;
Their robes were of crimson silk with rows
Of bells and pomegranates and furbelows,
Their turbans like blossoming almond-trees.

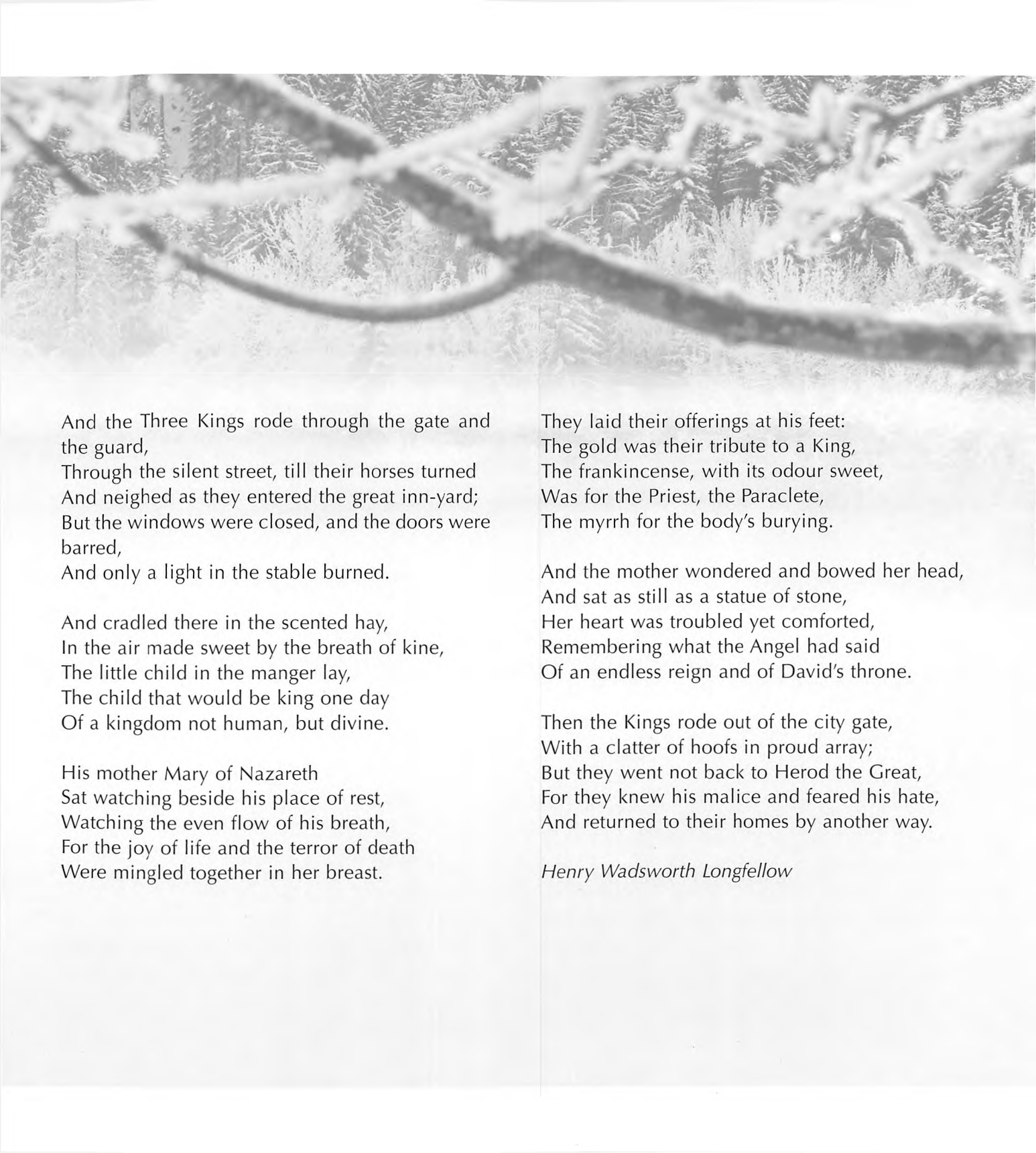
And so the Three Kings rode into the West,
Through the dusk of the night, over hill and dell,
And sometimes they nodded with beard on
breast,
And sometimes talked, as they paused to rest,
With the people they met at some wayside well.

‘Of the child that is born,’ said Baltasar,
‘Good people, I pray you, tell us the news;
For we in the East have seen his star,
And have ridden fast, and have ridden far,
To find and worship the King of the Jews.’

And the people answered, ‘You ask in vain;
We know of no King but Herod the Great!’
They thought the Wise Men were men insane,
As they spurred their horses across the plain,
Like riders in haste, who cannot wait.

And when they came to Jerusalem,
Herod the Great, who had heard this thing,
Sent for the Wise Men and questioned them;
And said, ‘Go down unto Bethlehem,
And bring me tidings of this new king.’

So they rode away; and the star stood still,
The only one in the grey of morn;
Yes, it stopped – it stood still of its own free will,
Right over Bethlehem on the hill,
The city of David, where Christ was born.



And the Three Kings rode through the gate and
the guard,
Through the silent street, till their horses turned
And neighed as they entered the great inn-yard;
But the windows were closed, and the doors were
barred,
And only a light in the stable burned.

And cradled there in the scented hay,
In the air made sweet by the breath of kine,
The little child in the manger lay,
The child that would be king one day
Of a kingdom not human, but divine.

His mother Mary of Nazareth
Sat watching beside his place of rest,
Watching the even flow of his breath,
For the joy of life and the terror of death
Were mingled together in her breast.

They laid their offerings at his feet:
The gold was their tribute to a King,
The frankincense, with its odour sweet,
Was for the Priest, the Paraclete,
The myrrh for the body's burying.

And the mother wondered and bowed her head,
And sat as still as a statue of stone,
Her heart was troubled yet comforted,
Remembering what the Angel had said
Of an endless reign and of David's throne.

Then the Kings rode out of the city gate,
With a clatter of hoofs in proud array;
But they went not back to Herod the Great,
For they knew his malice and feared his hate,
And returned to their homes by another way.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



The Christmas Gospel according to St Matthew

And the birth of Jesus took place in this way: Mary, his mother, was betrothed to Joseph; but before they were aware of having come together, she was found to have conceived a child through the power of the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, who was an upright man, did not wish to speak ill of her, and he considered whether he should set her free without causing any stir. While he was still pondering this, see, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said to him, 'Joseph, Son of David, do not let yourself be swayed from taking Mary to yourself as your wife. What is stirring in her womb has been conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son. You shall give him the name Jesus, for he will heal his own of their sins.'

All this took place, so that the word of the Lord, spoken by the mouth of the prophet, might be fulfilled:

See, the maiden will conceive;
she will bear a son,
he shall be called Emmanuel.

Translated, that means: God is in our midst.

When Joseph rose from sleep, he followed the directions of the angel and took Mary to himself as his wife. He was not aware of any coming together with her until she bore her son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Now when Jesus had been born in Bethlehem in Judea in the reign of King Herod, see: priest-kings from the realms of the East came to Jerusalem and said, 'Where is the newborn child who is destined to be king of the Jews? We saw his star in the realms of the East and have come to bow down to him.'

When King Herod heard the question he was alarmed, and the whole of Jerusalem with him. He called together all the chief priests and scribes of the people and enquired of them, 'Where is the Christ to be born?' And they answered, 'In Bethlehem in Judea; for thus it is written by the prophet:

Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
you are not the least among
the leading places in Judah;
for from you shall come the ruler,
the shepherd of my people Israel.'

Then Herod invited the priest-kings to come, and in confidential conversation he learnt from them the precise time when the star had appeared. And he directed them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and

see what you can find out about the child. And when you have found him, bring me word; then I, too, will go to bow down before him.'

After these words from the king they went on their way; and see, the star which they had seen in the realms of the East showed them the way, until it stood over the house where the child was. And when they saw the star they were filled with exceedingly great joy. They entered the house and beheld the child and Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him and opened their treasures and offered him gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. And a dream-vision directed them not to return to Herod, so they departed to their own country by another way.

Matthew, 1,18–2,12, rendered by Jon Madsen

Kings cake

INGREDIENTS

5 eggs
250 g (8¾ oz) sugar
200 g (7 oz) butter or margarine
125 ml (½ cup) milk
1 pinch salt
350 g (12⅓ oz) flour
3 level tsp baking powder
1 tsp vanilla essence
1 tsp cinnamon
1 pinch grated nutmeg
1 pinch ground cloves
200 g (7 oz) chocolate vermicelli or flakes
1 almond

Beat the eggs together with the sugar and soft butter/margarine until fluffy and creamy. Add the milk, salt, vanilla essence, nutmeg, cloves and chocolate. Sift the flour together with the baking powder and fold into the mixture.

Turn the mixture into a ring-shaped cake tin and press an almond into it so it stays hidden. Bake at 175°C (350°F) for approximately one hour.

Whoever gets the piece of cake with the almond hidden in it is the king, and is exempt from household chores for that day – or you can choose other kingly privileges.





Three kings tableau

Just as the account in Luke's gospel is different from the one in Matthew's gospel, we set up the nativity scene with the shepherds differently from our tableau of the three kings.

Cover a small table with yellow cloths, and make a house for Mary and Joseph from yellow cloth too. You can make a backdrop from a blue cloth with a shooting star.

Use the figures you made for the nativity scene, with Mary holding the baby Jesus in her arms.

The three kings (or wise men) stand reverently in front of the house. On Epiphany Day they place their gifts in front of the mother and child and turn to leave.

Twelve candles symbolising the twelve apostles may be placed in a semicircle around the figures.





MATERIALS FOR THE KINGS

White unspun sheep's wool (such as New Zealand wool)
Green, brown, yellow, blue, grey and red magic wool (fleece)
Golden gift cord
3 pipe-cleaners
Sewing kit

To make the figures, start with white wool roving as described in the section on Mary and Joseph (see page 55). One of the three kings has dark skin, and all their gowns are white. The kings' cloaks are floor length and their seams are tucked in at the foot end. The cloaks can remain sleeveless

(as described with Joseph's cloak, see page 56) or you can wind some coloured wool tightly or loosely around the arms (see the photographs for inspiration). The kings' gowns and cloaks are embroidered and decorated with golden gift cord. You can use your own imagination in terms of the details applied. The colours of the crowns and the turban correspond to the kings' cloaks.

Each king has a gift in his hands. Felt a small golden-yellow ball as gold for the red king, an incense burner for the green king and a vessel for the myrrh of the blue king. The presents are placed loosely into the kings' hands and not sewn on, so they can be left with the baby Jesus.



Ideas for Three Kings Day

In Central Europe there are not many traditional practices connected with Three Kings Day. The best-known custom is 'star singing', which is mainly practised in Catholic regions. Children dressed up as the three kings go from house to house, sing a song, say a verse and ask for a donation for children in poorer countries. Sometimes they start their rounds a day or two before Epiphany. On the door or doorframe they leave their initials 'C + M + B' and the year in white chalk. Their visit is supposed to bring good luck to the inhabitants of the house. Usually children are accompanied by an adult from the congregation of the local church.

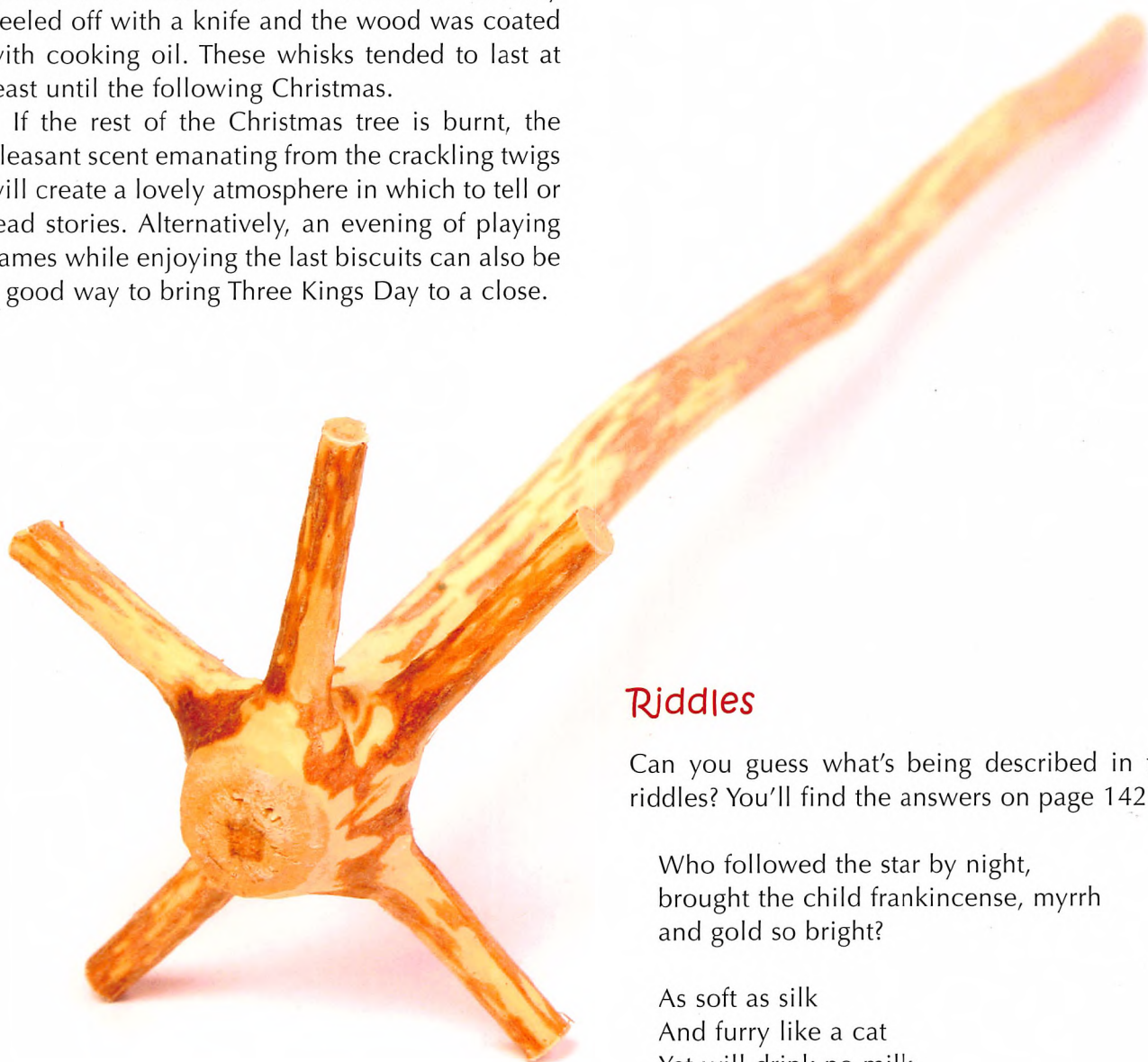
In some places, mostly at Waldorf Schools or other anthroposophical institutions, a three kings play is performed. If you have the opportunity to watch such a play, it's well worth it. The images and words presented in this old play help to form a connection with the festival and to develop an understanding of the underlying truths.

Three Kings Day may be the right time to take the decorations off the tree – often it has started to drop its needles by then. If the tree was decorated with Lebkuchen, apples or other edible things, the children might like to help by eating these – perhaps neighbouring children would like to come and help too. You can also start a tradition with another family to visit each other every year at Epiphany. A kings cake (see page 137) can be another highlight for this day.

The dry Christmas tree, having served its time, can be taken to a collection site or you might wish to burn it on the fire, stove or bonfire. Starting from the top, cut off the branches and twigs with secateurs. People used to make a

whisk from the topmost section: the upper twigs were trimmed, leaving a length of the trunk as a handle (see illustration). The bark was carefully peeled off with a knife and the wood was coated with cooking oil. These whisks tended to last at least until the following Christmas.

If the rest of the Christmas tree is burnt, the pleasant scent emanating from the crackling twigs will create a lovely atmosphere in which to tell or read stories. Alternatively, an evening of playing games while enjoying the last biscuits can also be a good way to bring Three Kings Day to a close.



Riddles

Can you guess what's being described in these riddles? You'll find the answers on page 142.

Who followed the star by night,
brought the child frankincense, myrrh
and gold so bright?

As soft as silk
And furry like a cat
Yet will drink no milk
Nor sit on your mat.
Appears in spring when the sun is warm
Ask the bees before they swarm!



Answers to Riddles

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Poems taken from:

A Journey Through Time in Verse and Rhyme, edited by Heather Thomas, Floris Books, Edinburgh: 'Advent' and 'Earth's Nuptials' by Ann Ellerton; 'Christmas' by Margaret Morgan; 'Christmas' by Rex Raab; 'Christmas Night' after Karl Schubert; 'Christmas Song' by E. Field; 'Jack Frost' by Cecily E. Pike; 'The Little Fir Tree' by Margaret Rose; 'There is a Rose that Blossomed' translated by Eileen Hutchins; 'To Wonder at Beauty' by Rudolf Steiner.
The Waldorf Song Book, Brien Masters, Floris Books, Edinburgh: 'The Shepherd's Song' by Brien Masters.
The Youth's Companion (an American children's magazine), 1910: 'St Nicholas Song' by Eleanor Amerman Sutphen.

Further Reading

- Adolphi, Sybille, *Making Fairy Tale Scenes*,
Floris Books, Edinburgh.
- , *Making Flower Children*, Floris Books, Edinburgh.
- , *Making More Flower Children*, Floris Books,
Edinburgh.
- Berger, Petra, *Feltcraft*, Floris Books, Edinburgh.
- Berger, Thomas, *The Christmas Craft Book*,
Floris Books, Edinburgh.
- Berger, Thomas & Petra, *Crafts through the Year*,
Floris Books, Edinburgh.
- , *The Gnome Craft Book*, Floris Books, Edinburgh.
- Guéret, Frédérique, *Magical Window Stars*,
Floris Books, Edinburgh.
- Jaffke, Freya, *Celebrating Festivals with Children*, Floris
Books, Edinburgh
- , *Toymaking with Children*, Floris Books,
Edinburgh.
- , *Work and Play in Early Childhood*, Floris Books,
Edinburgh.
- Jaffke, Freya & Dagmar Schmidt, *Magic Wool*, Floris
Books, Edinburgh.
- Madsen, Jon, *The New Testament: A Rendering*, Floris
Books, Edinburgh.
- Masters, Brien, *The Waldorf Song Book*, Floris Books,
Edinburgh.
- Schäfer, Christine, *Magic Wool Fairies*, Floris Books,
Edinburgh.
- Schmidt, Dagmar & Freya Jaffke, *Magic Wool*,
Floris Books, Edinburgh.
- Thomas, Heather, *A Journey Through Time in Verse and
Rhyme*, Floris Books, Edinburgh.
- Wolck-Gerche, Angelika, *Creative Felt*, Floris Books,
Edinburgh.
- , *More Magic Wool*, Floris Books, Edinburgh.
- , *Papercraft*, Floris Books, Edinburgh.

Christmas and winter books (all from Floris Books)

- Beskow, Elsa, *Ollie's Ski Trip*
- , *Peter and Lotta's Christmas*
- Drescher, Daniela, *Little Fairy's Christmas*
- Klaassen, Sandra, *Uan the Little Lamb*
- Koopmans, Loek, *The Little Christmas Tree*
- Lindgren, Astrid, *A Calf for Christmas*
- Muller, Gerda, *Winter* (boardbook)
- Nordqvist, Sven, *The Tomtes' Christmas Porridge*
- von Olfers, Sibylle, *The Story of the Snow Children*
- Sehlin, Gunhild, *Mary's Little Donkey*
- Verschuren, Ineke, *The Christmas Story Book*
- Wenz-Viëtor, Else, *The Christmas Angels*
- , *On Christmas Eve*

Resources

Sources for magic wool and natural materials:

AUSTRALIA

Morning Star

www.morningstarcrafts.com.au

Winterwood Toys

www.winterwoodtoys.com.au

NORTH AMERICA

The Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North
America maintains an online list of suppliers at:
www.waldorfearlychildhood.org/sources.asp

UK

Myriad Natural Toys

www.myriadonline.co.uk



This practical, fully illustrated book includes creative suggestions for each day from December 1 through to Christmas and Epiphany.

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Christel Dohm is a Waldorf kindergarten teacher from Germany, specialising in remedial teaching and craftwork. She regularly holds workshops, and lectures at conferences for teachers. She is also a passionate gardener and dancer.



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